



Najib wins bid

Panel allows appeal to overturn High Court dismissal of application for leave to commence judicial review on issue linked to purported royal addendum on house arrest.

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A supporter showing solidarity with Najib outside the Palace of Justice in Putrajaya yesterday. - REUTERS/SPIC



Focus on tourism, investment and economy: PM

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim says govt to equip all states to become tourist destinations to align with Visit Malaysia Year 2026 campaign.

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Social media platform licensing sparks 'safety vs freedom' debate

Cyber security specialist says new requirement could serve as cornerstone for building trust in digital space.

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Be courteous to individuals of all faiths, Muslims urged

Important to observe compassion and Islamic principles when addressing sensitive situations: Academic

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Anwar and Tiong shaking hands, accompanied by (from left) Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil, deputy prime ministers Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof at the launch of the VM2026 campaign yesterday. — AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN

PM launches Visit Malaysia Year 2026 campaign

➤ Involvement of all states, parties would help achieve projected income of RM147.1b and 35.6m tourist arrivals: Anwar

SEPANG: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim wants all ministries to focus on enhancing capabilities in the fields of tourism, investment and the economy, with the involvement of all states through the Visit Malaysia Year 2026 campaign.

Anwar, who is also finance minister, said every state and district has its own strengths to attract visitors.

"In fact, as we strive to make a success of the Asean chairmanship, we will ensure our programmes will equip all states, with no exceptions, to become tourism destinations this year and next year, in particular," he said at the launch of the Visit Malaysia Year 2026 (VM2026) campaign yesterday.

Anwar said the comprehensive involvement of all parties would help the nation achieve a

projected income of RM147.1 billion as well as targeted tourist arrivals of 35.6 million.

He said for the campaign, inclusivity becomes a major approach in promoting the country's sustainability and harmony in terms of a multicultural legacy with a strong cultural foundation.

"So, the impact of Visit Malaysia 2026, as I've said, will go far beyond the tourism industry to include hospitality, transport, retail and food industries, while the economic benefits will be shared by urban and rural communities."

He said the Madani framework itself is about inclusivity in championing sustainability concurrently with the attainment of a higher quality of life and harmony between development and nature.

Anwar described Malaysia as a unique

destination that is environment-friendly and has a charming multicultural identity, which is culturally divergent and rich.

He commended the VM2026 theme song titled *Surreal Experiences*, adding that it perfectly encapsulates Malaysia's uniqueness while being appealing to the younger generation.

"If we look at the theme song, it captures the inclusiveness of all districts and states in the Peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak.

"It is something catchy and I must thank (Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister) Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing."

The VM2026 campaign features a new logo, mascots, theme song and aircraft livery, Bernama reported.

In addition to the new theme song, the Malayan sun bear is the campaign's official icon, in line with its status as an endangered species and a symbol of Malaysia's commitment to wildlife conservation.

The animal is represented by two mascots, Wira and Manja, representing inclusivity and diversity.

Govt urged to address fishing vessel regulation concerns

SIBU: The government decision to mandate the installation of mobile tracking units (MTU) on Class C fishing vessels has drawn criticism from fishing industry stakeholders.

Two days ago, more than 200 members of the Sarawak Fishing Vessels Association in the state suspended operations for a week, with its chairman Harry Tan stating that the move was to protest what they view as unfair treatment and policies imposed by the Fisheries Department.

Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing called on the relevant authorities to initiate immediate and effective dialogue with the fishermen to find appropriate solutions and prevent the issue from escalating.

Tiong, who is also Bintulu MP and Dudong assemblyman, said the situation could

potentially disrupt the food supply chain in Sarawak and with the Chinese New Year approaching, it would affect the supply of fish.

"If the authorities do not promptly implement a better solution, there will likely be a shortage of supply, forcing the public to pay higher prices for fish," he said in a statement yesterday.

Tiong said the Fisheries Department had said it would not approve the renewal of licences for Class C trawlers without satellite trackers as of Jan 2, and vessels found operating without them would face enforcement action.

He said fishermen in his constituencies had repeatedly voiced concerns, emphasising that the measure would add to their financial burden.

"The cost of installing the MTU alone

exceeds RM6,000. Then, there's another RM2,000 annually for rental and maintenance," he said, adding that the fishermen face added challenges adapting to climate change and increased minimum wages while enhancing their competitiveness in the market.

He emphasised that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had called on the government to prioritise resolving the fundamental issues faced by the people and had directed the secretaries-general of all ministries to address public concerns personally.

"I sincerely hope that the director-general of the Fisheries Department and Agriculture and Food Security Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu will address this issue and resolve it appropriately to ensure fishermen can continue to make a living." — Bernama

Move to stem problem of heavy vehicle overloading

PUTRAJAYA: The Transport Ministry will focus this year on efforts to address the issue of overloading involving heavy vehicles, which has been occurring for years, said its minister Anthony Loke.

He said the ministry would study the need to amend and improve laws such as the Road Transport Act 1987, Land Public Transport Act 2010 and the Commercial Vehicles Licensing Board Act 1987.

He added that this includes exploring the need to review the rates of compounds and fines for overloading offences.

"I want to state here my desire and determination to, once and for all, tackle and resolve this issue of overloading.

"It needs a lot of integrated action," he told a media conference after delivering the ministry's 2025 New Year message yesterday.

He said the ministry would review the logistics ecosystem, apart from collaborating with port authorities to resolve the issue of overloaded vehicles.

"We are also studying the suitability of imposing liability on the consignee, who may be responsible in the ecosystem for the offence of overloading."

Loke said the ministry would also look at the legal framework to gazette regulations for pick-up vehicles to carry goods or loads safely as long as they do not exceed the permitted weight limit.

"This is to ensure uniformity from the aspects of legislation and enforcement in the field."

Loke added that the ministry would review its policy on the registration and use of rebuilt vehicles to ensure that only heavy vehicles with the best integrity, safety and quality are allowed on the road.

"For this, the ministry will collaborate with the Investment, Trade and Industry Ministry to comprehensively review the policy."

He said based on Road Transport Department records, there were 145,836 rebuilt vehicles with active status and 38,000 units that are inactive nationwide. — Bernama

Bodycams for RTD enforcement officers

PUTRAJAYA: Transport Minister Anthony Loke has announced that the Road Transport Department (RTD) will introduce bodycams for its personnel to enhance enforcement transparency.

Speaking at a media conference following the ministry's 2025 New Year briefing, he said this would improve their effectiveness, particularly concerning heavy vehicles.

He added that the measure was specifically requested by RTD director-general Datuk Aedy Fadly Ramli to ensure the highest standards of image, safety and integrity for officers on duty.

"The use of body cameras not only protects the image and integrity of RTD but also safeguards the officers themselves.

"As I have mentioned before, our officers sometimes face criticism, humiliation and various accusations. With the body cameras, RTD officers are protected, as any evidence during their enforcement actions can be captured." — Bernama

Cabinet to discuss incident involving Palestinians

SEPAJANG: A commotion involving Palestinians at Wisma Transit Kuala Lumpur (WTKL) will be discussed at a Cabinet meeting tomorrow.

Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil said: "In several Cabinet meetings before, the issue of relocation (of the Palestinians) to new premises was raised.

"The Cabinet has not been informed of the updates but I am sure there will be some for the media after the meeting."

On Sunday, the Armed Forces confirmed that the commotion, which occurred on Saturday and was widely discussed on social media, stemmed from the wish of the Palestinians to expedite their return to Palestine.

A similar incident occurred in October last year, involving Palestinians expressing dissatisfaction over being housed at the transit centre and the restrictions on their movements.

On Aug 16 last year, Malaysia brought in 127 Palestinians, including 41 injured individuals affected by Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, here for medical treatment.

The injured were treated at the Tuanku Mizan Armed Forces Hospital while their relatives were accommodated at WTKL.

When asked about the ministry's actions following the spread of videos on social media, including one that occurred at Masjid At-Taqwa in Taman Tun Dr Ismail, Fahmi said the public is often exposed to online content that has uncertain authenticity.

"I call on everyone to make an effort to seek and understand the true context of such content.

"It is important that we exercise patience to obtain or conduct fact-checking." - Bernama

Bid by Najib on addendum remitted back to High Court

➤ Premised on new evidence admitted by applicant, panel finds issue of hearsay can no longer stand

PUTRAJAYA: In a 2-1 majority decision, the Court of Appeal has remitted Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak's bid to the High Court for a hearing on its merits, regarding his claim of the existence of a royal addendum allowing him to serve the remainder of his six-year prison sentence under house arrest.

Justices Datuk Azhahari Kamal Ramli and Datuk Seri Mohd Firuz Jaffril allowed the former premier's appeal to overturn the High Court dismissal of his application for leave to commence a judicial review on the matter.

Justice Datuk Azizah Nawawi, who led the panel, dissented, stating the appeal had no merit.

Azizah also denied Najib's application to adduce additional evidence to support his claim whereas Azhari and Mohd Firuz allowed it.

Najib, 71, is appealing the Kuala Lumpur High Court decision on July 3 last year, which dismissed his application for leave to commence a judicial review of the purported addendum issued by the 16th Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

In delivering the decision, Mohd Firuz said the court took note of the reasoning of the High Court judge for dismissing the leave application, which was largely based on Najib relying on hearsay evidence.

"Premised on the new evidence admitted by the applicant, we find that the issue of hearsay can no longer stand.

"Bearing in mind that an applicant in a judicial review only needs to show that he or she has a good, arguable case premised on

the fact that his interest or rights have been aggrieved and the case is not frivolous and vexatious, we are minded to allow the appeal.

"We order the matter be remitted to the High Court for a hearing of the substantive judicial review application."

Regarding the application to adduce additional evidence, Mohd Firuz noted that Najib had written to respondents seeking confirmation of the existence of the addendum order but they did not respond.

"The High Court judge had decided that the information obtained from these various sources were hearsay."

Azizah, in her minority decision, said there was no appealable error made by the High Court in ruling that the evidence presented in the hearing was hearsay, Bernama reported.

"I agree with the finding of the High Court judge that there is no legal duty imposed on the respondents, particularly the Pardons Board, to confirm the existence or produce any order related to the exercise of the power of pardon."

She said neither the written law nor the Federal Constitution contains any provision requiring the Pardons Board to confirm or disclose the existence of a

pardon order, including the addendum order.

Earlier during proceedings, Najib's counsel Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah produced a letter from the Pahang Sultanate Council regarding the addendum while submitting the application to present additional evidence.

"The letter, dated Jan 4, was addressed to Najib's eldest son Datuk Mohamad Nizar by the Comptroller of the Royal Household of Sultan of Pahang, Datuk Ahmad Khairizal Ab Rahman."

Senior federal counsel Shamsul Bolhassan, representing the government and other respondents, said the addendum was never discussed or brought up during the Federal Territory Pardons Board 61st meeting on Jan 29 last year.

"The main order, as announced in February, had agreed to reduce Najib's jail sentence from 12 years to six, and the fine from RM250 million to RM50 million.

"That (main order) is the only one signed and sealed by the 16th Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah and this order was directed to the then minister."

Meanwhile, Home Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail said the Prisons Department has never received any directive

from the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya Pardons Board to allow Najib to serve the remainder of his prison sentence under house arrest.

He said on Feb 2 last year, the Prisons Department only received meeting minutes and an order to implement the decision made by the board during its meeting on Jan 29, 2024.

He added that the directive, signed by Al-Sultan Abdullah and witnessed by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories) Dr Zaliha Mustafa, merely instructed the Prisons Department to reduce Najib's prison sentence to Aug 23, 2028 and cut his fine to RM50 million.

The order also stated that if the fine is not paid, the prison sentence will be extended by another year, making his release date Aug 23, 2029, he said.

"The letter received by the Prisons Department does not mention house arrest. As a department tasked with implementing the directive, the Prisons Department must act with integrity in executing the order.

"It is important to clarify that the Home Ministry and the Prisons Department have not concealed any decision made by the Pardons Board or failed to comply with it. We only act based on authentic and official directives, as received," Saifuddin Nasution said during a special press conference yesterday.

"With this, I hope to make it clear that the Home Ministry has fully carried out Tuanku's (Al-Sultan Abdullah's) directive. Any claims to the contrary are untrue."

Penang launches townhouse design

BUKIT MERTAJAM: Penang has introduced a new affordable housing category based on the "co-house" concept in Permatang Tinggi.

State Housing and Environment Committee chairman Datuk Seri S. Sundarajoo said this is the first time the state, through the Penang Housing Board, is building terraced homes or landed houses with a townhouse design under the C3 Affordable Housing category.

"We are developing this as a townhouse, a hybrid residential concept in which a single plot accommodates two homes. One family can own the ground floor while another family can own the upper floor."

He was speaking to reporters after the groundbreaking ceremony for the project yesterday. - Bernama



FESTIVE PREPARATIONS

... A worker in Penang decorating the Kek Lok Si Temple with lights yesterday ahead of Chinese New Year on Jan 29.

- BERNAMAPIC

Digital library system and data app to benefit 100,000 students

IPOH: The Polytechnic and Community College Centralised Library System and iPolyc Data Dashboard App are set to benefit over 100,000 students, driving digitalisation within the

college ecosystem.

Polytechnic and Community College Education Department deputy director-general Muhamad Rumzi Mamat said the system would facilitate access to reading materials

and repositories.

"The system, developed using the Koha open-source platform, is a strategic move towards an inclusive and sustainable digital library.

"The app provides the

latest institutional information, such as the number of students, staff statistics and comprehensive institutional management data."

He was speaking at a press conference after officiating at the

launch of the system and app at Politeknik Ungku Omar yesterday, Bernama reported.

He said the introduction of the system and app was focused on students and benefitted college staff.

Punters abuzz with excitement as Toto jackpot hits RM73 million

PETALING JAYA: Malaysian punters are abuzz with excitement as the Supreme Toto 6/58 jackpot has reached RM73.8 million for the next draw on Jan 8.

In 2017, a businessman from Penang won RM69.6 million in the Grand Toto 6/63 jackpot.

However, the most incredible story unfolded in 2022, when a 41-year-old machinery supplier from Penang won the largest jackpot in Malaysian history with a staggering RM95 million out of a total jackpot sum of RM97.75 million.

The incredible prize money offers

players a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to change their lives for the better, and join the elite ranks of some of the nation's legendary jackpot winners.

Now, with the Supreme Toto 6/58 jackpot of RM73.8 million waiting to be won, Malaysians are once again

filled with hope and anticipation.

To stand a chance of winning the jackpot, players just have to choose six numbers between one and 58.

They then have to purchase their tickets from any Toto outlet located nationwide.

Many Sports Toto fans are also

hoping that the current second-largest jackpot in Malaysia could hit a new record by surpassing the RM97.75 million jackpot won in 2022.

Over the years, the Toto jackpot games have created life-changing moments for many lucky players.

Licence requirement sparks debate on rights of web users

➤ Regulation for social media platforms could serve as cornerstone for building trust, enhance security in digital space: Specialist

BY DEEPAKSHI MANICKAM
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PETALING JAYA: As Malaysia enters 2025, internet messaging and social media services providers with eight million or more users are mandated to hold an Applications Service Provider class licence (ASP (C) Licence).

This has sparked a nationwide debate about online safety versus freedom of expression.

Cyber security specialist firm Novem CS CEO Murugason Thangaratnam said the new licence is required pursuant to the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 for providers to make their services available in Malaysia.

"Licensing is a way to create a trusted ecosystem, provided it is not biased or has a hidden agenda.

So transparency in its implementation is the key to its success."

He said online safety and freedom of expression are not mutually exclusive, but jointly achieve harmony, and that the new licensing requirement could serve as a cornerstone for building trust in the digital space.

Murugason emphasised that democracy thrives on the free exchange of ideas which enables the public to make informed decisions.

"However, the ease of online communications has led to abuses such as cyberbullying, threats and the spread of extremist content, which should not be protected.

"Online users are increasingly aware of the importance of safety. Most are willing to accept additional security measures, such as the need for additional licensing, provided their rights and privacy are protected."

Murugason said "overreach" is a pressing concern and may discourage some Malaysians from expressing their opinions online out of fear of surveillance or content takedown.

"Social media platforms that are now accountable for moderating harmful content must navigate the fine line between removing illegal content and preserving lawful speech."

Hence, he said a balanced review system is critical to ensuring that platforms respect users' rights while adhering to the new licensing requirement.

He said licensing should incentivise platforms to create robust review systems that respect free speech while effectively addressing harmful content since this is crucial to fostering trust in the digital space.

The new licensing requirement focuses on social media and messaging platforms as it aims to enhance child safety and curb harmful behaviour, he added.

In contrast, the European Union's (EU) Digital Services Act (DSA) applies to a broader spectrum, including e-commerce platforms and online marketplaces.

He said the DSA imposes stricter transparency and accountability requirements, such as annual independent audits for those designated as "very large online platforms".

Besides that, India's IT Rules 2021 mandate swift action where social media platforms must remove illegal content within 36 hours of receiving a complaint.

Murugason said the comparisons highlight opportunities for Malaysia to refine its approach by incorporating lessons from more comprehensive frameworks in the EU and India.

"A core difficulty lies in defining harmful content.

"Cultural, social, and political differences influence perceptions of what constitutes offensive material.

"For instance, critical commentary on governments may be considered harmful in some countries but viewed as legitimate dissent that is protected by 'free speech' in democracies."

He said a universal definition of "harmful content" is nearly impossible to achieve due to cultural and societal differences, so Malaysia's approach should be context-sensitive and adaptable to local needs.

Murugason said cyber threats such as deepfakes and online scams pose significant risks, and countries that have successfully tackled them can offer valuable insights.

"Leveraging advanced technologies like artificial intelligence-driven moderation and blockchain programmes for content verification could enhance the efficacy of our licensing regime."

Murugason added that investing in cutting-edge technologies and fostering public-private collaborations will be crucial to combating such emerging threats.

The new licensing requirement is a pivotal step to shaping the country's digital future and its success hinges on striking the delicate balance between safety and freedom, he said.

No cause for panic over hMPV cases, public told

KUALA LUMPUR: The public need not panic about the presence of human metapneumovirus (hMPV), as it is known for its seasonal recurrence patterns.

Molecular virologist Assoc Prof Dr B. Vinod said hMPV lacked the high transmissibility and asymptomatic spread observed with Covid-19.

Vinod, who is also a lecturer at Monash University Malaysia Jeffrey Cheah School of Medicine and Health Sciences, said although China is experiencing seasonal respiratory illness spikes, including hMPV, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and influenza, there was no evidence to suggest that these posed a global pandemic threat like Covid-19 had.

Vinod said Malaysia had a pre-existing circulation of hMPV and other respiratory viruses, adding that the arrival of tourists was unlikely to introduce a new or unknown pathogen.

"Unlike SARS-CoV-2 (which causes Covid-19) in 2020, hMPV does not spread asymptotically as extensively, and its severity is generally manageable in healthy populations."

Vinod said the high-risk groups identified for hMPV infection include infants and young children, particularly those under one year old, elderly individuals who may have a generally weaker immune system, as well as immunocompromised individuals such as those undergoing chemotherapy or managing chronic illnesses.

"hMPV, Covid-19 and influenza are all respiratory viruses but differ in severity.

"Covid-19 and influenza range from mild to severe conditions.

"hMPV, on the other hand, only generally causes mild to moderate respiratory illness.

"However, in high-risk groups, it could also lead to severe conditions like bronchiolitis or pneumonia."

Elaborating on the symptoms of hMPV, Vinod said the infection typically resembled the common cold, which might include a cough, fever, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, wheezing, shortness of breath and sometimes a rash.

To reduce the risk of hMPV infection, Vinod advised regular hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser when soap and water are unavailable.

Vinod also advised the public to refrain from touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands. — Bernama

Hobby becomes joyful pursuit for hotel reviewer

KUALA LUMPUR: Burhanuddin Abdul Jalil, 55, a senior executive at a financial firm, spends about RM1,000 from his salary each month to stay at different hotels and write reviews of his experiences on his website.

Almost every weekend, he checks into a hotel, and to date, has logged 234 stays at 169 hotels in Malaysia, mostly those located in the Klang Valley, since embarking on this "hobby" in 2020.

"Before 2020, my hobby was photography, and my favourite subject was landscapes. I would capture stunning views from tall buildings or natural settings across various locations, including in Indonesia.

"But when travel restrictions were imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, I booked hotel rooms around the capital city as accommodation was still allowed under certain standard operating procedures at that time."

What began as a way to cure boredom during the pandemic has now turned into an "addiction" and a

source of joy, prompting him to continue the activity to this day.

"My friends often ask for recommendations on good hotels to stay at, so I decided to start writing reviews for every hotel I visit. Since I'm also good at photography, it felt like a natural fit," he said.

"I write my reviews in the form of short essays using simple, easily understood Bahasa Melayu. Alhamdulillah, I've received many positive feedback, and my reviews have helped others make informed decisions about choosing hotels that suit their needs," he said.

He shares his observations on hotel facilities through his website hanuds.wixsite.com/hanudds and contributes articles to the "Hotel Review Malaysia" Facebook page.

Based on his experience, Burhanuddin noted that hotel prices can vary greatly, sometimes being very affordable and other times skyrocketing.

He suggested using various online hotel booking apps to compare prices. — Bernama



Burhanuddin said his reviews have helped others make informed decisions about choosing hotels that suit their needs. — BERNAMAPIC

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Be courteous to people of all faiths, Muslims urged

➤ Experts highlight importance of compassion and Islamic ethics in handling sensitive situations

BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: An academic and expert in Islamic ethics has reminded Muslims that their religion requires them to act courteously and respectfully towards individuals of all faiths.

Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin rector Prof Dr Muhamad Rozaimi Ramle made the statement in response to a recent video showing a man disrupting a congregation at At-Taqwa Mosque in Taman Tun Dr Ismail, Kuala Lumpur.

The incident, which occurred during early morning prayers on New Year's Day, has sparked widespread concern and online debate over the appropriate response to such situations.

The 160-second video shows the man, reportedly suffering from mental health issues, wandering inside the mosque despite being asked to leave.

The situation escalated, resulting in the

man being harassed, kicked and shouted at by several individuals.

Muhamad Rozaimi said Muslims should avoid harsh actions, regardless of who the allegedly offending individual is, their behaviour or their mental state.

"If necessary, let security personnel or police handle the situation. Beating or harassing the individual is inappropriate. I understand the anger and emotions involved, but we must respond in a manner befitting the situation," he said.

He emphasised that hostility is against Islamic principles, irrespective of race, religion or health, and urged Muslims to follow the teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

"From the *Sirah* (Prophet's biography), it is evident that non-Muslims were allowed by the Prophet to enter mosques. In one *hadith*, a bedouin urinated in a mosque. While the Prophet's companions wanted to react harshly, the Prophet instructed them to leave him alone.

"Instead of punishing the man, the Prophet gently explained that mosques are sacred spaces and such actions were inappropriate."

Muhamad Rozaimi called on Muslims to embody Islamic manners and ethics, treating others with kindness to reflect the beauty of Islam.

Perlis Mufti Datuk Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin also advised Muslims to avoid sending the wrong message to non-Muslims.

"Some people visit mosques out of curiosity and without any hostile intent. They

should be welcomed and Islamic practices explained to them. It is neither wise nor appropriate to harass any visitor.

"Sharing videos of such incidents can lead to misunderstandings, with the public questioning such behaviour, and families or communities feeling hurt by the lack of compassion," he said.

Mohd Asri added that mosques are open for everyone to reflect and learn.

If someone behaves inappropriately, they should be escorted out respectfully.

"This does not mean non-Muslims can enter and behave as they please. They too must show respect when entering a mosque, as it is a sacred place for Muslims."

In a statement on Jan 2, mosque officer Ahmad Fakhruddin Mohd Tahir said the man damaged a television set and rushed towards the front of the prayer hall.

"The man appeared to be in an 'abnormal' state. Eventually, a brief struggle ensued involving him, security personnel and several others who attempted to apprehend and hand him to police," he said.

Brickfields OCPD assistant commissioner Ku Mashariman Ku Mahmood confirmed a police report had been lodged.

"The man has been suffering from mental illness since April 2022. He last received treatment on Jan 16, 2023 at the University Malaya Medical Centre but has not undergone follow-up treatment since. The case is being investigated under Section 427 of the Penal Code," he said.

Cops seek help to find teen girls

IPOH: Police are seeking assistance from the public to locate three teenage girls who have been reported missing since October.

Ipoh district police chief ACP Abang Zainal Abidin Abang Ahmad identified the missing teens as Nurul Syuhada Muksin, 18, K. Ashwinia and Shomina, both aged 16.

Nurul Syuhada is believed to have left her hostel at a polytechnic in Ipoh on Oct 9 carrying a bag with her personal belongings.

"Nurul Syuhada, from the Palma Raja Apartments, Bandar Botanic in Klang, Selangor, is approximately 152cm tall, of slender build and has a dusky complexion," he said in a statement yesterday.

Anyone with information on her whereabouts is urged to contact investigating officer Sgt Jhony Bunsu at 012-301 9152 or the Ampang Baru police station at 05-546 7005.

Ashwinia, a student at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Jalan Tasek, was last seen on Dec 25 last year.

"Ashwinia, from Persiaran Perajurit T6 in Taman Syabas, is 162cm tall and of slender build," Abang Zainal Abidin said. Those with information on her whereabouts can contact investigating officer Sgt Jamariah Ya'acob at 012-550 0883 or the Ipoh district police headquarters at 05-245 1500.

Shomina, reported missing on Dec 24 last year, is a UNHCR cardholder.

"Shomina, from Pasir Puteh, is 140cm tall, plump and has a dark complexion," he said.

Anyone with information on Shomina is advised to contact investigating officer Sgt Mohamad Azlan Mohd Noor at 019-514 1791 or the Ipoh district police headquarters. – Bernama

Police identify drug syndicate mastermind

KOTA BHARU: Police have identified the mastermind behind a drug smuggling syndicate following the arrest of a Malaysian suspect in Pekan Sungai Golok, southern Thailand, on Dec 30.

Kelantan police chief Datuk Mohd Yusoff Mamat revealed that the mastermind, who is from Penang, is currently under surveillance.

The arrested suspect, a 24-year-old male from Kelantan, is believed to have played a key role in the operations of the syndicate.

"The suspect who was arrested has a close relationship with a woman from Laos, who is believed to be his accomplice. They are suspected of smuggling drugs supplied from Thailand," Mohd Yusoff said after the Kelantan police contingent monthly assembly yesterday.

He added that police are working to identify other distribution networks linked to the syndicate.

Additionally, Malaysian and Thai police are collaborating closely to monitor and dismantle such syndicates. – Bernama

Civil servant held over RM50,000 bribe

KUALA TERENGGANU: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has remanded a civil servant for five days on suspicion of accepting a RM50,000 bribe as inducement to endorse and approve payment claim documents for five projects at a public university in Terengganu.

The remand order, effective until Jan 10, was issued by senior assistant registrar Yuhanis Mohd Roslan following an application by MACC at the Kuala Terengganu Magistrate's Court yesterday.

According to sources, the suspect, who is in his 40s, was detained at about 1pm yesterday upon arriving at the Terengganu MACC office to provide a statement. – Bernama



The MPV was severely damaged, resulting in the death of a female passenger. – BERNAMAPIC

Woman killed, eight injured in lorry-MPV collision

KLUANG: A woman was killed, and eight others were injured in a collision involving a lorry and an MPV at Km86 of Jalan Johor Bahru-Ayer Hitam on Sunday evening.

Kluang district police chief ACP Bahrin Mohd Noh said the incident occurred at 7.15pm when a lorry, driven by a 53-year-old man, veered into the opposite lane while travelling from Machap to Ayer Hitam.

The lorry struck the right side of the MPV, causing fatal head injuries to a 39-year-old woman seated in the rear seats. She was pronounced dead at the scene.

"A seven-month-old baby infant in the MPV sustained head injuries and is currently receiving treatment at the Enche' Besar Hajjah Khalsom Hospital in Kluang.

"The other victims in the MPV, including the 26-year-old male driver, also sustained injuries and are being treated at the same hospital. The lorry driver was taken to Pantai Hospital Batu Pahat for treatment," ACP Bahrin said in a statement yesterday.

The case is being investigated under Section 41(1) of the Road Transport Act 1987. Meanwhile, Ayer Hitam Fire and Rescue

station operations commander PBK II Shoromi Salih said they received an emergency call at 7.16pm and dispatched six personnel with a first responder team vehicle to the scene.

"Upon arrival, all victims had exited the vehicles. The emergency team immediately provided first aid.

"A woman in the MPV was pronounced dead at the scene, while seven others from the vehicle and the lorry driver sustained injuries and were sent to hospital.

The operation concluded at 8.09pm. – Bernama

Afghans transit in Manila for resettlement in US

MANILA: Up to 300 Afghans arrived in the Philippines yesterday on temporary stays while waiting for their documents to be processed for US resettlement.

The Philippines and the United States signed an agreement last July allowing Afghans to stay in Manila while their US Special Immigrant visas were being processed.

This was despite domestic opposition over security and other concerns.

"The Department of Foreign Affairs issued the appropriate Philippine entry visa to these applicants," said its spokesperson Teresita Daza.

"All applicants completed extensive security vetting by security agencies."

A US State Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity, would not be specific about the number involved other than to say "up to 300".

Under the deal, the US government will shoulder the cost of stays in Manila, including food, housing, medical care, security and transport.

The Afghans will stay at a facility run by the State Department Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts.

Daza had previously said the Afghans could stay for no more than 59 days and would be "confined to their billet facility" except for embassy interviews.

The applicants all underwent medical screening in Afghanistan.

Many Afghans fled their country in the chaotic evacuation of August 2021 as US and allied forces pulled out to end Washington's longest war.

Many of those who had worked with the ousted government arrived in the United States seeking resettlement under an immigrant visa programme but thousands were left behind waiting for their visas to be processed. – AFP

Spanish tourist killed by elephant

BANGKOK: A "panic-stricken" elephant killed a Spanish tourist while she was bathing the animal at a sanctuary in southern Thailand, police said yesterday.

The 23-year-old woman was hit by the stressed animal's trunk at the Koh Yao Elephant Care Centre in Phang Nga province.

Wild elephants have killed 227 people, including tourists, in the past 12 years, according to the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation.

An elephant killed a 49-year-old woman at a national park in Loei province in northern Thailand last month.

While encounters between villagers and wild elephants are common, attacks at sanctuaries remain rare.

Bathing elephants is a popular activity among visitors in Thailand.

However, animal rights groups argue that bathing elephants can cause them distress and some sanctuaries in the country do not allow it. – AFP

Prabowo's free-meal programme takes off

Indonesia aims to combat stunting

JAKARTA: Indonesia launched an ambitious US\$4.3 billion (RM19.4 billion) free-meal programme yesterday to combat stunted growth due to malnutrition, a key election promise of President Prabowo Subianto.

Prabowo has pledged to provide free nutritious meals to tens of millions of schoolchildren and pregnant women, saying it would improve their quality of life and boost economic growth.

"This is historic for Indonesia, for the first time conducting a nationwide nutrition programme for toddlers, students, pregnant and nursing mothers," said presidential

spokesman Hasan Nasbi.

At least 190 kitchens run by third-party catering services opened nationwide, including some run at military bases, were tasked with preparing meals from midnight before distributing them to schoolchildren and pregnant women.

Second-grader Khalifa Eldrian was seen beaming after finishing his free lunch of rice, chicken, vegetables and a banana at a primary school in East Jakarta.

"I'm happy because the food was delicious. I can concentrate better now when studying," he said.

The government has allocated 10,000 rupiah (RM2.80) per meal and has a budget of 71 trillion rupiah (RM19.40 billion) for the 2025 fiscal year. It is set to deliver meals to almost 83 million people by 2029.

Stunting affects 21.5% of children in the archipelago of some 282 million people. The Southeast Asian nation aims to reduce the rate to 5% by 2045.

Staff at a kitchen in Bogor, West Java, had worked tirelessly since just after midnight.

"We serve different menus every day. It has to be different so children won't get bored," said staff member Ayu Pertiwi.

She said they were able to serve fairly nutritious meals such as eggs and fish even with the limited budget, although meat would likely only be served twice a month.

"We can still create various menus, but the options are limited. For us, the most important thing is the meal is nutritious," she said.

The programme was met with scepticism from experts and the public when it was first announced

during last year's election campaign.

Tan Shot Yen, a Jakarta-based nutritionist and doctor, said trials late last year were mostly conducted in urban centres and assessments were not made available to the public.

She said the government needed transparent monitoring and robust food safety management to prevent hazards and the inclusion of unhealthy processed products, such as instant noodles and sausages.

"I hope this programme is not just a temporary charitable effort to fulfil political promises," she said.

"To continue it for the long term, the government should focus not only on funding but also on empowering communities so (recipients) are not simply reliant on free meals once a day while struggling to find food for the other two meals," she said.

Prabowo has championed the programme since the presidential campaign and his team has said the poorest and most remote areas would be prioritised.

He travelled to several countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom seeking funding support, after he was sworn in last October.

He secured a US\$10 billion deal with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in November for support in several sectors, including the free-meal programme.

However, analysts have said the scheme is not sustainable in the long term.

"I am pessimistic if everything is shouldered by the central government.

"Economically, it's not sustainable," said Aditya Alta, a public policy analyst from the Centre for Indonesian Policy Studies think tank.

"Stunting is a multidimensional issue and addressing it through one approach is insufficient" – AFP



Pupils savouring their free meal at a school in Jakarta. – REUTERS/SPIC

S\$1m worth of drugs seized, four arrested

SINGAPORE: The city-state's Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) seized drugs estimated to be worth over S\$1 million (RM3.27 million) on Saturday, potentially enough to fuel the addiction of around 4,590 drug abusers for a week.

CNB said in a statement that four Singaporean suspects – three men and a woman – were arrested in connection with the drug haul, which included heroin, ice,

ketamine, ecstasy and cannabis.

Two of the male suspects, aged 25 and 27, were arrested by CNB officers at a car park in the vicinity of Cassia Crescent.

A third suspect, a 25-year-old man, was arrested following a short pursuit after he fled upon witnessing the arrest of the two men. A weapon was also seized.

Meanwhile, a 25-year-old woman, suspected of being a drug

abuser, was arrested in a raid at the suspected hideout of the 27-year-old man, a residential unit in the same vicinity.

CNB said investigations into the drug activities of the arrested suspects are ongoing.

CNB Intelligence Division director deputy assistant commissioner Aaron Tang said the bureau would pursue drug traffickers and bring them to justice.

"Drug traffickers have no concern for the thousands of lives their deadly wares would have destroyed had the drugs reached the streets," he said.

Under Singapore law, a person found guilty of trafficking more than 15g of diamorphine or "pure heroin", or more than 250g of methamphetamine, or more than 500g of cannabis, faces the death penalty. – Bernama

More than 260 displaced Rohingya arrive in Aceh

BANDA ACEH: More than 260 Rohingya, including women and children, have arrived in Indonesia's easternmost province of Aceh.

An East Aceh official, Iskandar, said the group of refugees arrived on a beach near the town of West Peureulak on Sunday night.

"There are 264 of them – 117 males and 147 females," Iskandar said, adding around 30 arrivals were children.

He said they had initially been on two boats, one of which had sunk off the coast while the second managed to move closer to shore.

They were able to walk to the shore when the tide was low, he said.

Iskandar said the local government officials had not decided where to move the arrivals.

Rohingya arrivals in Indonesia tend to follow a cyclical pattern, slowing during the stormy months and

picking up when sea conditions calm down.

In November, more than 100 refugees were rescued after their boat sank off the coast of East Aceh.

In October, 152 Rohingya were brought ashore after being anchored for days off the coast of South Aceh

district while officials discussed whether to let them land.

Indonesia is not a signatory to the UN refugee convention and says it cannot be compelled to take in displaced people from Myanmar, calling instead on neighbouring countries to share the burden. – AFP



Canadian PM Trudeau likely to announce resignation

➤ Ruling Liberals trailing badly in polls

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is increasingly likely to announce he intends to step down, though he has not made a final decision, a source familiar with Trudeau's thinking said on Sunday.

The source spoke to Reuters after the *Globe and Mail* reported that Trudeau was expected to announce that he would quit as leader of Canada's ruling Liberal Party after nine years in office.

The source requested anonymity because they were not authorised to speak publicly.

Trudeau's departure would leave the party without a permanent head at a time when polls show the Liberals will badly lose to the official opposition Conservatives in an election that must be held by late October.

Sources told the *Globe and Mail* that they did not know definitely when Trudeau would announce his plans to leave but said they expect

it would happen before an emergency meeting of Liberal legislators tomorrow.

An increasing number of Liberal parliamentarians, alarmed by gloomy polls, have publicly urged Trudeau to quit.

The prime minister's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment outside regular business hours. The prime minister's published schedule said he would participate virtually in a Cabinet committee meeting on Canada-US relations.

It remains unclear whether Trudeau will leave immediately or stay on as prime minister until a new Liberal leader is selected, the *Globe and Mail* report said.

Trudeau took over as Liberal leader in 2013 when the party was in deep trouble and had been reduced to third place in the House of Commons for the first time.

If he does resign, it would likely spur fresh calls for a quick election to put in place a stable government able to deal with Donald Trump's administration for the next four years.

The prime minister has discussed with Finance Minister Dominic LeBlanc whether he would be willing to step in as interim leader and

prime minister, one source told the newspaper, adding that this would be unworkable if LeBlanc plans to run for the leadership.

Trudeau, 53, had been able to fend off Liberal legislators worried about the polls and the loss of safe seats in two special elections.

But calls for him to step aside have grown since December, when Trudeau tried to demote Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, one of his closest Cabinet allies, after she pushed back against his proposals for more spending.

Freeland quit instead and penned a letter accusing Trudeau of "political gimmicks" rather than focusing on what was best for the country.

Trudeau propelled the Liberals to power in 2015 promising "sunny ways" and a progressive agenda that promoted the rights of women.

But the everyday realities of governing gradually wore him down.

Although Ottawa spent heavily to protect consumers and businesses, racking up record budget deficits, this provided little protection from public anger as prices soared.

A botched immigration policy led to hundreds of thousands of arrivals, straining an already overheated housing market. — Reuters

Investigators ask police to arrest Yoon

SEOUL: Anti-graft investigators asked police yesterday to arrest impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol, after he fended off their week-long efforts to bring him into custody over his failed martial law bid.

The former star prosecutor has refused questioning and defiantly holed up in his residence, with a failed arrest attempt last week leaving investigators trying to extend the warrant's deadline and asking for help.

Investigators from the Corruption Investigation Office (CIO) said they had asked for the police to take over because of the difficulties they had faced. Yoon's legal team has refuted the CIO's authority to arrest him.

The validity of the warrant expired yesterday.

"We plan to request an extension from the court," said CIO deputy director Lee Jae-seung.

He said they would consult police on the timing of the warrant extension. Police have yet to accept the request.

Last week investigators made a U-turn over safety fears following a tense, hours-long standoff with hundreds of security forces.

Yoon faces prison or, at worst, the death penalty if convicted for insurrection over briefly suspending civilian rule and plunging South Korea into its worst political crisis in decades, but both he and his supporters have remained defiant.

"The presidential security service will protect the president, and we will protect the presidential security service," said Kim Soo-yong, 62, one of the protest organisers.

The initial warrant was issued on the grounds that Yoon has refused to emerge for questioning over his martial law decree.

His lawyers have repeatedly said the warrant is "unlawful" and "illegal".

The head of Yoon's presidential security service said on Sunday he would not allow investigators to arrest the suspended president. — AFP

GRAVITY DEFYING ...
 Members of the Edo Firemen Preservation Association perform traditional firefighting techniques as they balance on top of bamboo ladders during an annual New Year's fire brigades exercise in Tokyo yesterday.
 — AFP/IC



Taiwan reports 2.4m cyberattacks daily on govt offices

TAIPEI: Cyberattacks on Taiwan government departments doubled last year from the previous year to an average of 2.4 million attacks a day, the island's National Security Bureau said, adding most were launched by Chinese cyber forces.

Taiwan's Government Service Network, or GSN, received a daily average of 2.4 million attacks last year, double the daily average of 1.2 million in 2023, according to a report by the National Security Bureau.

The bureau offered rare details of the attacks, attributing most to China's cyber forces, with telecommunications, transport and defence among the top targets.

"Although many of those attacks have been effectively detected and blocked, the growing numbers of attacks pinpoint the increasingly severe nature of China's hacking activities," the report said.

China routinely denies being involved in hacking attacks but is frequently accused by foreign governments, especially the United States which last week said Chinese hackers stole documents from the US Treasury Department.

The Taiwanese report said China launched some of the attacks to coincide with Chinese military drills around the island, including distributed denial-of-service attacks designed to disrupt access to web pages of Taiwan's transport and financial institutions.

The move, the report said, was meant to "intensify the harassment effect and military intimidation". — Reuters

BRIEFS

MUAN AIRPORT CLOSED UNTIL JAN 14

SEOUL: Authorities here have extended the closure of a southwestern airport where a Jeju Air plane crashed and killed 179 people onboard, the Land Ministry said yesterday. Authorities are still investigating the cause of the accident on Dec 29, when Jeju Air flight 2216 from Thailand carrying 181 passengers and crew belly-landed and slammed into a concrete barrier in a fireball. The closure of Muan International Airport has been extended until Jan 14, the ministry said in a statement. — AFP

NORTH KOREA FIRES BALLISTIC MISSILE

SEOUL: North Korea launched a ballistic missile yesterday as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was meeting key officials in Seoul. "North Korea sent unknown ballistic missile towards the East Sea," South Korea's military said, referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan. The launch took place while Blinken was meeting his counterpart and the South's acting president. The missile appeared to have fallen into the sea, the Japanese Defence Ministry and Japanese coast guard said in statements. — AFP

ETIHAD FLIGHT ABORTS TAKE-OFF IN MELBOURNE

SYDNEY: An Etihad Airways flight leaving Melbourne Airport was forced to abort its take-off on Sunday. Flight EY461 to Abu Dhabi was travelling down the runway when two tyres burst, forcing pilots to slam on the emergency brakes. "Due to damage to the tyres, we have been unable to tow the aircraft off the runway. Repairs will be done on location," Melbourne Airport said. All passengers on board the Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner were safe. — Bernama

CAIRO: Israel and Hamas wrangled on Sunday over the details of a deal to halt fighting in the Gaza Strip and return hostages home, as Palestinian officials said intensified Israeli bombardments had killed more than 100 people over the weekend.

A Hamas official said the group had approved a list of 34 Israeli hostages to be returned as part of a deal that could eventually lead to a ceasefire. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office swiftly issued a statement saying Hamas had not provided a hostage list.

Later on Sunday, the Hamas official provided Reuters a copy of the list showing the names of 34 hostages it agreed to set free in any possible ceasefire deal with Israel.

A renewed push is under way to reach a ceasefire in the 15-month war between Israel and Hamas, and return Israeli hostages who were taken to Gaza, before US president-elect Donald Trump takes office on Jan 20.

The effort comes amid a surge in Israeli military action in the enclave. Israeli airstrikes last weekend killed 105 Palestinians in Gaza, medics said. The Israeli military said it had killed dozens of gunmen.

The US State Department said Israel must comply with international law and do "significantly more to ensure the protection of civilians". It said, however, that it supports Israel's right to defend itself.

Israeli negotiators were dispatched on Friday to resume talks in Doha brokered by Qatari and Egyptian mediators, and US President Joe Biden's administration, which is helping to mediate, has urged Hamas to agree to a deal.

Hamas said on Friday it was committed to reaching an agreement as soon as possible, but it was unclear how close the two sides were.

A Hamas official told Reuters any agreement to return Israeli hostages would hinge on a deal for Israel to withdraw from Gaza and a permanent ceasefire or end to the war.

"However, until now, the occupation continues to be

Hamas and Israel wrangle over talks

➤ Occupation force airstrikes intensify

obstinate over an agreement over the issues of the ceasefire and withdrawal, and has made no step forward," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Netanyahu has consistently said the war will only end once Hamas is eradicated as a military and governing force.

Israel's military offensive has levelled swathes of the enclave,

driving most people from their homes and killed 45,805 Palestinians.

Israeli military strikes continued throughout the Gaza Strip on Sunday, with an airstrike killing five people in a house in the Nuseirat camp in central Gaza, Gaza health officials said, and another killing four in Jabalia in the north of the enclave.

Later in the day, an airstrike hit a police station in Khan Younis in southern Gaza, killing five people, medics said. It was not immediately clear if all the dead were police officers.

At nightfall, medics said an airstrike had killed three people in Bureij camp in central Gaza, bringing Sunday's death toll to 17.

The Israeli military said it had struck gunmen operating from the humanitarian area in Khan Younis, and a man who it said had carried out attacks from the humanitarian area in Deir al-Balah.

The Israeli military said on Sunday its forces had attacked more than 100 targets across Gaza over the weekend, killing dozens of gunmen. It said it had also destroyed rocket launch sites used to wage attacks on Israel. - Reuters



Fatah supporters gather for a rally ahead of the 60th anniversary of its establishment in Nablus on Sunday. - AFP/IC

US plans more sanctions on tankers carrying Russian oil

WASHINGTON: The United States plans to impose more sanctions on Russia over its war on Ukraine, taking aim at its oil revenues with action against tankers carrying Russian crude, two sources with knowledge of the matter said.

President Joe Biden's administration has sought to shore up support for Ukraine before Donald Trump takes office on Jan 20 given the Republican leader's complaints about the cost of US support for Ukraine.

It is unclear what Trump's

approach to sanctions will be.

The Biden administration is planning sanctions targeting tankers that carry Russian oil sold above the West's US\$60 (RM270) a barrel price cap, the sources said. Russia has used this fleet of aging ships to evade the cap.

Since Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the US has sanctioned dozens of these vessels, out of a fleet estimated to be in the hundreds, to reduce its ability to fund the invasion.

The cap has led Russia to redirect

its oil sales to China and India, who have been willing to buy Russian crude, which is typically sold at a discount to the overall market even if sold above the price cap.

"It is going to be a big package," one of the sources said. The other source said the sanctions would also likely include measures against people involved in some networks trading oil above the price cap.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said last month that the US is looking at further sanctions on the tankers and would not rule out sanctions on

Chinese banks as it seeks to reduce Russia's oil revenue.

The Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control did not respond to a request for comment on Sunday.

The G7, the EU and Australia imposed the US\$60 cap on Russian oil in late 2022, banning the use of Western maritime services such as transport, insurance and financing for shipments of oil priced at or above the cap.

Russia is among the world's top three oil producing countries. - Reuters

Norway PM worried by Musk involvement in foreign politics

OSLO: Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said yesterday that he found it worrying that billionaire Elon Musk was involving himself in the political issues of countries outside of the United States.

Musk, a close ally of US President-elect Donald Trump, last month endorsed a German anti-immigration, anti-Islamic political party ahead of that country's national

elections next month, and recently made remarks on British politics.

"I find it worrying that a man with enormous access to social media and huge economic resources involves himself so directly in the internal affairs of other countries," Støre told Norwegian public broadcaster NRK.

"This is not the way things should be between democracies and allies."

If Musk were to involve himself in

Norwegian politics, the country's politicians should collectively distance themselves from such efforts, Støre said.

Musk, the world's richest person, spent more than US\$250 million (RM1.1 billion) to help Trump get elected and has been tasked by Trump to prune the federal budget as a special adviser.

The German government last

week accused Musk of trying to influence Germany's upcoming election with a guest opinion piece for the *Welt am Sonntag* newspaper.

German Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck said Musk's support for Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany was a "logical and systematic" play by the billionaire for a weak Europe that will not be able to regulate as strongly. - Reuters

Ecuador ex-VP Glas back in prison

GUAYAQUIL: Ecuador's former Vice-President Jorge Glas was returned to prison hours after he was evacuated for security reasons amid chaotic scenes inside the jail, the prison authority said.

Glas' lawyer, Sonia Gabriela Vera, said on Sunday the former vice-president had been evacuated from La Roca prison after an attempt on his life by mutinying inmates. She said the government was responsible for the situation.

Prisoners caused incidents "in a clear strategy to destabilise order and peace in the country", the Ecuadorian prison agency SNAI said in a statement. It said that Glas was taken back to prison after the armed forces carried out weapons and explosives control operations.

Vera urged the United Nations and other organisations to intervene after what she called an "attempted assassination" of Glas.

The attack "is the result of a state that has condemned him to danger, torture and slow death," Vera said.

Glas was arrested in April after Ecuadorean security forces stormed Mexico's embassy in Quito, where he was holed up after seeking asylum.

Glas' supporters say the arrest is politically motivated. - Reuters

BRIEFS

TWO SHOT DEAD IN WEST BANK

TEL AVIV: Two Palestinians, including a 17-year-old boy, were killed by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank on Sunday. Palestinian media said Israeli forces opened fire on the home of a 37-year-old man in a town south of Jenin. The Health Ministry said the 17-year-old was killed in a raid on Askar camp in Nablus. The Israeli military said its forces killed a gunman in the West Bank, confiscated weapons and dismantled an explosives laboratory. - Reuters

GUNMEN FIRE ON VEHICLES, 3 KILLED

TEL AVIV: Gunmen opened fire on vehicles, including a bus, yesterday near a village in the occupied West Bank, killing three people and wounding seven. "Paramedics confirmed the deaths of three victims, including two women and a man," emergency service provider Magen David Adom said, while the military reported that troops were pursuing the attackers. - AFP

SEVEN INFANTS DIE IN COLD WEATHER

ISTANBUL: At least seven infants have died in Gaza due to cold weather and inadequate shelter. "A total of 7,700 newborns lack lifesaving care and at least seven have died," the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said. The World Health Organisation condemned a raid last week, which put Kamal Adwan Hospital, the last functioning hospital in northern Gaza, out of service. - Bernama



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Nip juvenile delinquency before it escalates

WHEN children under 15 roam the streets at night without parental knowledge, it is a serious concern that demands attention.

Our youths are becoming rebellious, engaging in dangerous activities like illegal cycling (*basikal lajak*), late-night races and exhibiting violent behaviour. Some are involved in petty crimes.

We cannot ignore such behaviour, hoping it will resolve on its own. It is crucial that we address these issues before they escalate further.

Recently, a 14-year-old girl in Seberang Perai was reported to have stabbed her aunt during a quarrel.

In 2022, there were 3,013 cases of minors involved in criminal activities, with the majority of arrests made among those aged 16 to 18.

Additionally, many teenagers have been found living on the streets in Kuala Lumpur. Youths as young as 15 are found living in abandoned, dilapidated buildings, alongside the homeless, drug dealers and pimps.

Instead of being at home and attending school, these young people are surviving in the streets, engaging in petty crimes, drugs and prostitution. Many of them come from broken homes and have fled abusive parents or step-parents.

Some children are abandoned by parents who feel helpless and are unable to manage their children's disruptive behaviour.

Thankfully, institutions

like the Henry Gurney School in Malacca, which functions similarly to a prison, focus on reforming juvenile delinquents, giving them a chance to turn their lives around.

In addition to being a correctional facility, it also serves as an educational institution where inmates can continue their studies.

Thanks to dedicated teachers, many students from the school have gone on to pursue higher education.

Once students leave the school, it is up to their families and society to embrace them and offer them a second chance at life.

Families play a crucial role in a child's physical, mental, spiritual and social development. Many of these troubled children come from broken homes, where parents are divorced or separated.

While not every child from a broken family becomes dysfunctional, most dysfunctional children come from such backgrounds.

Violence starts and ends at home as children learn by observing their surroundings. Violence often leads to more violence.

Parents and schools must take greater responsibility in guiding the social and intellectual growth of children.

They need to monitor their activities and foster a culture of care and concern.

**Samuel Yesuiah
Seremban**

Dream role just wishful thinking

AS development director of Sime Darby Plantations, my main job was handling consultancies for third-party clients. But sometimes the group would also give me assignments.

Unlike working for clients, these did not bring in any fees, but one assignment nearly got me a different kind of work.

It was a time in the early 1990s when interest in planting fast-growing trees was on the rise, and the company wanted a feasibility study. As Sarawak still had a lot of jungle, it was agreed that this was the place for me to go.

I had taken Leow Kok Yuan on the flight to Sibul, where we were going to start work. Leow was adept with figures, and his computer could work out any project as long as I gave him the numbers. He would key them in, but not before asking me a lot of questions.

He was cautious and often tested and tempered my assumptions. I liked the way he could defend his figures when we faced the people at the top.

Of course, coming from the top, the idea was quickly adopted by all whom we went to see, including the head of logging for Sime Darby. He was managing a concession upriver at Batang Baleh, up Rajang River, and I had heard about him.

He was Ross Ibbotson, a man with many years of experience in the logging industry. He had also planted softwoods in Sabah.

I did not meet Ibbotson until a few days later. However, Leow and I were warmly welcomed by his staff - all young and alert Foochow girls. They offered us coffee and cakes, and from the high floor, I had a chance to take in the wonderful scenery of the Rajang River, with longboats coming in and sawmills across the river working hard.

Leow asked for the files on planting softwood trees. Softwoods grew fast, and I had earlier seen the forests of acacia and albizia in Sabah. They grew well, as did the gmelina. All these trees had long fibre and were suited for making woodchips.

It took about three days for Ibbotson to come back from Batang Baleh, a tributary of the Rajang River. He was a stout, short figure, packed with energy, and he did not waste any time.



ESTATE MANAGER WRITES
BY MARBOB ABDULLAH

"I would recommend that you use acacia mangium. Even on poor soils, you can get a decent girth increment each year. You can harvest at year 10, and you don't have to replant. The stumps grow new shoots that can be harvested again 10 years later. The woodchips from the logs go to Japan to produce paper."

Leow waited at his keyboard for some figures to be mentioned. Ibbotson went on: "You may need about 100,000ha, planted over 10 years. Your problem is finding a location with that kind of size."

He stopped to look at Leow and me and turned to the map of Sarawak on the wall.

"It would be here at Tatau or a bit further inside at Tubau, not too hilly for the work we would want to do."

That evening, he invited us to dinner at a restaurant in a private room, but he had to answer questions from Leow.

Ibbotson was happy to give his attention to Leow although his wife had arrived only that afternoon from London. In any case, he did not seem to have much to say to her.

He had only one day left with us in his office before he said he had problems upriver and rushed back up the Rajang River. He said he had to carry out some logging by helicopter where the slope was too steep.

Leow and I stayed back another day with help from the girls, and Leow invited them to lunch. Somewhere along the way, I heard that Mrs Ibbotson had caught a flight back to London.

On the flight back, I looked down to see where the plantation was likely to be. Sarawak was fast catching up on planting but with oil palm. It would be a change if I was to run a forest plantation.

I imagined myself on a horse, riding

through the trees each day to check which trees would need thinning and which could be left until harvest time. The scene ran in my head, and I wished it would come true.

It was therefore more reason for me to work carefully to the last detail. To be sure, I went to Mount Gambier in Australia and Rotorua in New Zealand to see if the radiata pine would be suitable, and then to Seattle to see the logging operations of Douglas fir by Weyerhaeuser at White River.

I left again to visit the plantations of Eucalyptus in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Leow stayed back to work at his desk. At the presentation, the bosses approved his numbers without demur.

Eventually, a meeting was set with the head of government in Kuching, and I accompanied Tunku Tan Sri Ahmad Tunku Yahya, the head of Sime Darby, and finance director Martin Berry. Tunku Ahmad did all the talking and placed a proposal on the table, and even when it was time to leave, Berry and I did not have to say a word.

In the end, we did not get the project. Perhaps the land available was not big enough.

I was disappointed as I could still see myself at the centre of the action, on a horse or driving a Range Rover. In the office, Leow would be in charge of his staff, whom I would help to select. Who would not want to head a business like that and in the middle of a land of legendary beauty like Sarawak?

However, later on, rumour had it that Ibbotson was also aiming for the role. If that were true, he certainly would have been a formidable rival, adding yet another adventure to his life.

I smiled when I heard this. Who could blame him?

The writer has extensive experience in the management of oil palm plantations.

Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

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Steer Asean towards resilient future

COMMENT

By Dr Rais Hussin

MALAYSIA'S Asean chairmanship in 2025 marks a pivotal moment for the region. By championing inclusivity, sustainability, economic diversification and balanced leadership, Malaysia can guide Asean towards stability, resilience and meaningful cooperation.

Tackling issues such as the Myanmar crisis, integrating Timor-Leste and revitalising the region's digital economy, Malaysia's proactive and transparent approach has the potential to shape Southeast Asia's future while benefiting its citizens and the global community.

Key priorities

As Asean chair, Malaysia's foremost priority must be fostering unity while respecting the sovereignty and diverse interests of member nations – an approach aligned with its Madani vision of inclusivity, integrity and equitable participation. This resonates with Asean's foundational principle of "Unity in Diversity".

Malaysia should continue to foster balanced relationships with all major and middle powers, reflecting Asean's principle of neutrality. By doing so, Malaysia can help mitigate geopolitical rivalries and maintain Asean's centrality.

In line with Asean's 2040 goals, Malaysia must champion initiatives to enhance regional resilience. Key focus areas should include:

- Developing pragmatic frameworks for trade facilitation, technology exchange and resource-sharing, especially amidst inflationary and supply chain pressures.
- Collaborating with regional players, such as the BRICS+ and other emerging markets, to diversify partners and reduce economic over-reliance on any single bloc.
- Advocating a stronger regional focus on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). The global pivot towards the Indo-Pacific signals an intensifying competition for resources, heightening the risk of violent extremism and terrorism. While several Asean states have established P/CVE strategies, greater alignment with international best practices is essential. Such initiative could bolster global and regional partnerships, promote evidence-based approaches, leverage modern technologies and standardise professional competencies, ultimately strengthening collective resilience.
- Prioritising climate action, biodiversity

protection and renewable energy integration. Advocating stronger protection of Southeast Asia's rainforests and marine ecosystems amid escalating climate threats will be crucial.

➤ Championing Asean-wide adoption of 4IR technologies to bolster the digital economy, spur innovation and boost global competitiveness.

Addressing Myanmar crisis

Asean must move beyond statements and take decisive steps on Myanmar. This includes fully implementing the five-point consensus by setting clear timelines and benchmarks for the junta to meet.

Malaysia, as chair, can propose a regular assessment mechanism with transparent reporting. By collaborating with the United Nations and other international bodies, the bloc can offer tangible "carrots and sticks" – ranging from development assistance to calibrating sanctions on key military-linked enterprises. Balancing non-interference with collective integrity remains crucial.

At the same time, Asean should step up humanitarian efforts by working with UN agencies to aid refugees and at-risk groups, including ethnic minorities and the Rohingya.

Establishing safe zones and corridors inside Myanmar is vital, as is an Asean-led task force that can be built on public-private partnerships (mobilising resources and coordinating efforts among civil society, private sectors and philanthropic organisations) to deliver targeted aid to conflict areas and camps along the Thailand-Myanmar and Malaysia-Myanmar corridors. This approach ensures critical assistance and, again, protects regional stability.

Geopolitical tensions

Malaysia should reaffirm Asean's stance as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, advocating peaceful negotiations to minimise external interference. This includes championing dialogue-driven diplomacy through forums like the Asean Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit, which can help prevent confrontations in disputed waters.

In leading efforts to finalise the South China Sea Code of Conduct, Malaysia must ensure it is pragmatic and enforceable, featuring clear dispute resolution procedures, resource-sharing guidelines and protocols to de-escalate incidents.

By harnessing its balanced relations with major powers, Malaysia can mediate tensions through confidence-building measures, including joint naval exercises focused on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

These strategies will reinforce stability, uphold international law and help the region avoid becoming a battleground for great-power rivalry.

Advancing economic integration

Malaysia should spearhead Asean's integration through trade diversification by promoting engagement with emerging markets such as BRICS+ and regional blocks like AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area) to reduce reliance on traditional partners.

Malaysia could propose an Asean-BRICS+ roundtable to explore new trade corridors and shared infrastructure investments in non-renewable and renewable energy, logistics and digital connectivity. Concurrently, forging new educational partnerships in science, particularly in quantum and nuclear physics, would future-proof regional innovation.

Building on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, Malaysia can push for sector-specific free trade agreements that expand global markets for Asean small and medium enterprises.

Another priority is strengthening supply chains through better cross-border infrastructure and robust digital systems. Rolling out a uniform digital platform for trade facilitation (for example, blockchain-based eROO) would reduce cross-border inefficiencies and enhance reliability.

To secure staple commodities, an "Asean Strategic Reserve Alliance" can be proposed to leverage real-time data in managing stocks, sourcing and logistics of staple food-chain commodities and other industrial inputs to boost regional resilience against global shocks.

Finally, a unified Asean digital framework can be initiated to harness AI, IoT and blockchain. For example, harmonising e-commerce regulations and digital taxation can foster fair competition and protect consumers.

Creating an Asean-wide digital sandbox would test cross-border applications in fintech, e-health and agritech, thereby accelerating research and development and skills transfer. Through these efforts, Asean can solidify its standing as a global leader in the digital economy.

Timor-Leste's membership

To ensure a smooth transition for Timor-Leste's membership in Asean, Malaysia can lead capacity-building efforts by helping align Timor-Leste's policies with existing frameworks while supporting socioeconomic development. This includes fostering technical and policy integration through specialised training programmes and encouraging Malaysian

industries to invest in key sectors, such as agriculture and energy.

In addition, Malaysia should advocate Timor-Leste's equitable participation in Asean, ensuring it benefits from committees, dialogues and grassroots engagement.

Drawing on its experience, Malaysia can also mentor Timor-Leste in governance, infrastructure and economic development.

Through South-South cooperation, Malaysian agencies, NGOs and the private sector can address infrastructure and socioeconomic needs. In doing so, Malaysia can showcase Asean's inclusivity, underlining that the region remains open, forward-looking and committed to supporting emerging economies.

Embracing global leadership

Public engagement is key to broadening awareness of Asean's day-to-day impact. As Malaysia leads Asean, its citizens can showcase the nation's strengths – from Islamic finance and halal ecosystems to sustainable palm oil – on a global stage. Engaging in volunteer programmes, academic conferences and bilateral exchanges will empower Malaysians, especially youths, to act as citizen diplomats, strengthening international ties.

Organising national forums, university roadshows and creative collaborations in film, art and music would deepen cultural understanding and foster a vibrant sense of regional identity.

Finally, by championing a shared vision of inclusive growth, Malaysia can present a cohesive front during its chairmanship. Forging inclusive policies that allow all ethnicities and religions to coexist and thrive will build long-term resilience in food security, economic stability and digital competitiveness.

Through unity, Malaysians can help secure the success of the Asean agenda and the nation's leadership on the global stage. Malaysia's leadership is an opportunity and a responsibility to showcase its vision for a cohesive, resilient and sustainable Southeast Asia.

As chair, Malaysia's role extends beyond policymaking; it calls for strategic foresight, bold action and the active engagement of all stakeholders, including its citizens, to present a united front in navigating Asean's challenges and opportunities while driving the region toward a future-ready and prosperous bloc.

Dr Rais Hussin is the founder of Emir Research, a think-tank focused on strategic policy recommendations based on rigorous research. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

Jimmy Carter – an honest president

BY ERIC S. MARGOLIS

THE late Jimmy Carter was an exemplary man. His honesty, modesty and good work set the mark for what American presidents should be like. He was the quintessential Christian gentleman and a fine naval officer.

Unfortunately, this good man got embroiled in America's colonial misadventures more often than the social welfare projects and peace plans that he sought to pursue. Chief among these thorny problems was the Mideast – no place for a decent, honest man – and the ugly imbroglio in Iran.

Carter directed and took credit for his administration's flagship foreign policy effort, the much-ballyhooed Camp David Accords, a series of agreements that were supposed to end Arab-Israeli hostility, bring peace to the Mideast and address the festering problem of millions of homeless Palestinians who had been driven from their ancestral homes by the US-backed creation of the state of Israel.

Long, torturous negotiations ensued in September 1978 at Camp David, Maryland that finally brought together Palestine Liberation chief Yasser Arafat and Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin. With great fanfare, an agreement was proclaimed for Israel, PLO

(Palestine Liberation Organisation) and Egypt to recognise one another.

The Palestinians of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza were promised autonomy. Egypt was given US\$1.3 billion (RM5.85 billion) by the US; Israel was given US\$3 billion annually. All sorts of diplomatic and military goodies were offered. Peace was about to dawn.

However, the dawn never came. Egypt's then ruler, Anwar Sadat, took the American cash and supported Israel's plan to pack Palestinian refugees into the open-air Gaza prison. Sadat and Begin were awarded the Nobel Prize.

It was claimed that Sadat had been on the CIA payroll since the early 1950s. My journalist mother, Nexhmie Zaimi, interviewed Sadat and described him as "a clown". But a clever clown. Most Egyptians viewed Sadat as a traitor.

Meanwhile, Israel began backtracking on the accords. It refused to grant any independence to its captive Palestinians, imposed tighter military controls and continued expropriating Palestinian lands and building new Jewish settlements.

Shocked and dismayed by the selling-out of Palestinians, Carter wrote a book, *Peace not Apartheid* that accused Israel of South African apartheid behaviour towards Palestinians.

Predictably, he was blasted by a tsunami of vitriol by pro-Israel groups and accused of "antisemitism". In the media, the loveable, avuncular Carter quickly became a hate figure.

In 2020, the then (Donald) Trump administration cobbled together a "deal", known as the Abraham Accords, that paid off despotic Arab regimes like the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and basket case Sudan to make nice to Israel.

It was a sleazy compact deal worthy of New York real estate promoters or gang chiefs. All the members, Sudan excepted, were scared to death of Iran. Morocco's king was given a US imprimatur for his illegal annexation of Western Sahara.

Syria would not join this sell-out and was marked for regime change. Israel said all was ok until the mass eruption in Gaza began. Of all the Arab states, only dirt-poor Yemen acted to show support for the besieged Palestinians in Gaza.

In Washington, an addelepted President Joe Biden let Israel and its American neon fifth column take over his government and lay waste to Gaza. Many longed for the days of honest Jimmy Carter.

Eric S. Margolis is a syndicated columnist. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com



Carter's honesty, modesty and good work set the mark for what American presidents should be like. – AFP/PPIC

Parents dissatisfied with special needs education

WHILE much has been done to improve the education of persons with disabilities (PWDs), with increased allocations in Budget 2025, more needs to be done in terms of specialist teachers, upgraded infrastructure, quality of teaching and curriculum, and focus on individualised education plan (IEP) for each child. Most importantly there is a need to engage with parents and the community for the overall betterment of the special needs child or adult.

As the mother of a special needs adult daughter, who is now 34 years of age, and working as an assistant teacher, it continues to be a cause of concern that Malaysia continues to lag behind other neighbouring countries in its ability to provide the level of education and training required for special needs.

Based on current information, as of September 2019 there are 85,574 special education needs (SEN) students registered in Malaysia, of whom 68,874 students are in the Special Education Integrated Programme (SEIP), which covers mainstream schools with special needs classes. The breakdown also revealed 967 in preschool, 38,710 in primary schools and 29,197 students in secondary schools.

These numbers refer to parents who have registered their children in government special education classes, but there is a growing

number of parents, whose numbers remain unknown, who have chosen to enrol their special needs children, diagnosed as autistic, slow learners, dyspraxic, dyslexic, ADHD, Down syndrome and a variety of other known learning disabilities in private special needs centres or non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Due to the government's inability to provide for the education of PWDs to the same standard as normal children, many parents of PWDs seek private special schools or NGO centres to provide for the educational needs of their children and adults.

The cost is high and many parents feel not enough has been done to lessen their financial burden.

There is also the problem of overcrowded classrooms, due to lack of teachers and many parents have described the classes as more of baby sitting as teachers are unable to cope with the more difficult behaviours.

It is accepted that learning disabilities have an impact on 4-6%

of the population and Malaysia with a current population of 35 million reveals a figure of 2,100,000 PWDs. Only a fraction are registered at government schools, an unknown number in private schools, while many, possibly in rural and non-urban areas remain at home.

Lack of specialist trained teachers
Raaginee Shalesh, who founded a special needs private learning centre in 2004, *Pusat Jagaan and Latihan Insan Istimewa*, located in Subang Jaya, which today has 12 teachers and 150 students ranging in age from 9 to 38 years, feels parent dissatisfaction with government funded special education schools can be tackled with structural changes.

"There is a lack of trained professionals, whether speech therapists, specialist teachers, occupation therapists and psychologists trained in behaviour management.

"While there are many high functioning special needs, there is an equal number of low functioning PWDs who need early intervention

and an IEP while they are in primary school but the teachers in government schools are not trained to provide that kind of specialist training, and by the time they reach a certain age, they will not respond to any form of intervention," said Raaginee who also runs community programmes in sports such as futsal for PWDs."

Raaginee revealed that many parents are disappointed with the lack of updated resources needed for teaching and learning such as computers and gadgets that can enhance learning at a faster pace.

"Most of the special needs children are also lumped into one classroom and parents feel there is not only insufficient teachers but each of their children have different learning disabilities and cannot be taught in the same way-again the lack of an IEP," she shared.

Outdated and ineffective curriculum

The current curriculum is outdated and not tailored to address the diverse spectrum of curriculum needed for special needs and their

developmental changes. There is a lack of teaching resources in terms of learning tools needed to match an advanced curriculum for those who need it.

Parents' involvement and input

For the child to progress in special education classes, the teachers need to involve parents and provide reports on how to work with the child or adult at home but this is lacking due to insufficient teachers.

The biggest challenge is lack of a comprehensive, individualised approach to education for children and adults with special needs. The one-size-fits-all approach fails to address the diverse needs of special needs education.

Not many parents have the money or resources to provide private special needs therapy or even enrol in private centres.

It is time for the government to take cognisance of the need to not only provide classes but also ensure that the PWDs are provided the tools that will allow them to transition to working adults and be an asset in society.



EDUCATION MATTERS
BY DHARSHINI GANESON

EDUCATION

FOCUS 2025

Education matters remain an important component of Malaysian society. Today the landscape is fast paced with new exciting developments in technology such as AI, coding, virtual reality, and cybersecurity, leading the way for changes in curriculum development. To showcase the latest and most updated content, we invite you join us in 2025, and be part of our Education Focus!






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U Mobile to play major role in Felda's digital transformation

KUALA LUMPUR: U Mobile has signed an agreement with the Federal Land Development Authority (Felda) whereby the telco will play a critical role in supporting the government agency on its digital transformation drive.

In a statement yesterday, U Mobile said it will be implementing enterprise-grade connectivity solutions as a start to all Felda offices and branches nationwide.

"Felda's traditional communication platform that consists of physical landlines will be upgraded to a converged solution that will allow greater mobility, efficiency as well as the ability to provide better customer service," it said.

The telecommunication and digital service provider said individuals working at Felda's offices and branches nationwide will be able to access voice calls or data across three devices through one phone number.

U Mobile chief information officer Neil Tomkinson said the connectivity solution is just the beginning of a continuing partnership where 5G technology and solutions will be key to Felda's journey.

"Apart from that, Felda is our first government-linked company for our enterprise business, and we are proud to have received such endorsement for our technical expertise and are looking forward to support even more initiatives that contribute to the nation's growth in the coming months," he said.

Meanwhile, Felda strategic communications director Syrifan Indra Mitra Surya Hussin said Felda is confident that U Mobile will play a crucial role as a strategic partner in meeting the needs of the community. — *Bernama*

Awantec launches MDEC-accredited e-invoicing solution

CYBERJAYA: AwanBiru Technology Bhd (Awantec), through subsidiary Awantec Systems Sdn Bhd, has launched Awantax, an advanced e-invoicing solution designed to support Malaysia's phased mandatory e-invoicing implementation by the Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia.

Accredited by Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) and the Peppol Authority, Awantax ensures seamless compliance with both local and international e-invoicing standards. This provides businesses with confidence that they can meet regulatory requirements while enhancing efficiency and reducing costs.

Awantax simplifies compliance by optimising invoicing workflows and facilitating secure, seamless invoice exchanges with local authorities and global stakeholders.

Navigating the changes in Malaysia's tax landscape

↳ Consultancy firm Tratax provides overview of what's new in regulatory framework

PETALING JAYA: As Malaysia positions itself for sustainable economic growth and fiscal resilience, a series of tax measures are slated for implementation in 2025.

These initiatives aim to enhance revenue generation, promote business competitiveness and foster a more equitable taxation framework, reflecting the government's commitment to a holistic and forward-thinking approach to tax reform.

Tratax Sdn Bhd, a leading tax consultancy firm, has provided a comprehensive overview of the critical tax changes that will shape Malaysia's regulatory framework this year.

Tratax executive director Thenesch Kannaa said these reforms will have significant implications for businesses and individual taxpayers, influencing financial planning, compliance requirements, and overall tax strategies.

He said Tratax underscores the importance of proactive preparation and informed decision-making to navigate the changes effectively

amid a rapidly evolving tax landscape to boost economic growth and ensure a more equitable tax system,

Starting Jan 1, Malaysia's tax landscape will see several significant changes to enhance tax compliance and broaden the tax base.

Key measures include a 2% tax on individual dividend income and phased implementation of e-invoicing - beginning Jan 1 for entities with annual revenue between RM25 million and RM100 million, and from July 1 for those earning less.

To support this, a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) finder has been launched to help businesses verify customer TINs.

Additionally, sales tax will be expanded to cover non-essential goods, and services tax will apply to commercial transactions starting on May 1. Detailed guidelines will

be announced soon.

A Global Minimum Tax framework will take effect for financial years beginning Jan 1, aligning Malaysia with international tax standards.

Other key reforms include a new investment incentive framework slated for introduction by the third quarter of 2025, a real property gains tax self-assessment regime effective Jan 1, and the introduction of the single family office scheme by the first quarter, offering a 20-year income tax exemption and other benefits.

Businesses and individuals are urged to prepare for these wide-ranging changes to remain compliant and optimise tax strategies.

Further, Labuan's tax framework will undergo notable changes starting in 2025. These include the introduction of "fit and proper" criteria for full-time employees and the shift from the previous-year basis

to the current-year basis for tax assessment.

This transition will result in two assessment years for 2025, affecting taxpayers' cash flow. Additionally, Labuan will adopt self-assessment features to enhance compliance.

For corporate taxpayers, the Malaysian Income Tax Reporting System will mandate XBRL-based ((eXtensible Business Reporting Language) tax reporting from the 2025 tax year.

Businesses should prepare for the implementation of a self-assessment regime for stamp duty and the introduction of a carbon tax in 2026.

Thenesch said as businesses navigate the evolving tax landscape in 2025, staying informed and prepared will be key to maintaining compliance and seizing opportunities for growth.

"Tratax remains dedicated to supporting business decision-making by offering strategic insights and expert guidance on critical tax matters. By leveraging professional advice and proactive planning, businesses can better position themselves to thrive in a dynamic regulatory environment," he said.

Oriental Kopi unveils prospectus, set to raise RM184 million in listing exercise

■ BY **AIMIE SHAZRIE**
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KUALA LUMPUR: Food and beverage company Oriental Kopi Holdings Bhd yesterday unveiled its prospectus in preparation for its initial public offering (IPO) and subsequent listing on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia Securities.

Through its subsidiaries, Oriental Kopi operates cafe chains and engages in the distribution and retailing of its own branded packaged foods.

Oriental Kopi's IPO is expected to raise RM184 million which will be allocated for setting up a new head office, central kitchen and warehouse (29.2%), expansion of the cafe chain in Malaysia (19.8%), expansion of packaged foods segment (2.7%), marketing activities in foreign countries (3%), working capital (41.2%) and listing expenses (4.1%).

The IPO involves the issuance of 418.1 million new ordinary shares, representing 20.9% of the company's enlarged issued share capital of 2 billion shares.

The shares are allocated for the Malaysian public via balloting (60 million), eligible directors, employees, and contributors to the group's

success (20 million), private placement to selected investors (88.1 million) and private placement to Bumiputera investors approved by the Investment, Trade, and Industry Ministry (250 million).

Based on the IPO price of 44 sen per share, Oriental Kopi's market capitalisation is estimated at RM880 million upon listing. Applications for the public issue opened yesterday and will close on Jan 10, with the listing scheduled for Jan 23.

Oriental Kopi executive director Sean Koay Song Leng disclosed that the company is constructing a 108,448 square foot facility in Puchong, Selangor which will house the new head office, central kitchen and warehouse.

"This centralised facility will streamline our management functions, optimise F&B operations and enhance storage and distribution efficiency. It will also help alleviate the kitchen workload at our outlets, especially those with limited kitchen space," he said in a press conference following the prospectus launch.

Koay said the central kitchen will handle food production, while final preparation will still occur at the outlet kitchens.

As part of its expansion strategy,



From left: Oriental Kopi Holdings head chef Ho Poh Chian, Koay, executive director Callie Chan Yen Min, managing director Datuk Chan Jian Chern, Alliance Bank Malaysia Bhd group CEO Kellee Kam Chee Khiong and Alliance Islamic Bank Bhd CEO Rizal II-Ehzan Fadil Azim at the prospectus launch.

the company plans to open 13 new outlets across Malaysia this year and two additional cafes in Singapore by 2025.

"We are also exploring opportunities to expand into neighboring countries," Koay said, underscoring the company's regional ambitions.

Oriental Kopi has recorded commendable growth, with revenue increasing from RM5 million in the financial year ended Sept 30, 2021 to RM277.3 million in

financial year 2024 (FY24). This represents a compound annual growth rate of 280.9% over three years. During the same period, the company transitioned from a loss after tax of RM500,000 to a net profit of RM43.1 million in FY24.

In FY24, 94.1% of the group's total revenue was derived from cafe chain operations, while the remaining 5.9% came from the distribution and retail of packaged foods and other segments.



KERJAYA PROSPEK ACCEPTS RM256M JOB FROM E&O

PETALING JAYA: Construction outfit Kerjaya Prospek Group Bhd's wholly owned Kerjaya Prospek (M) Sdn Bhd has accepted a letter of award valued at RM256.4 million from Eastern & Oriental Express Sdn Bhd (E&OE) to execute and complete building construction works in Elmina West, Shah Alam. The scope of the project includes the construction of 360 units of three-storey terrace houses, alongside a clubhouse, landscaping works, and other related infrastructure. The project will be delivered in three phases, with construction slated to begin on Jan 20, 2025, and expected completion within 26 months. The contract is undertaken on an arm's length basis and based on normal commercial terms. E&OE is an indirect subsidiary of Eastern & Oriental Bhd, in which certain directors and major shareholders of Kerjaya have direct or indirect interests.

T7 GLOBAL ARM SECURES 3-YEAR SERVICES CONTRACT

KUALA LUMPUR: T7 Global Bhd's wholly owned subsidiary, Tanjung Offshore Services Sdn Bhd, has secured a contract from Carigali Hess Operating Company Sdn Bhd to provide maintenance, construction, and modification services. In a filing with Bursa Malaysia yesterday, T7 said the contract would commence from Jan 15 for a primary period of three years with an option to extend for two years. It said that the board envisages that the award will contribute positively to the company's earnings and net assets for the financial year ending Dec 31, 2025, and onwards until the expiry of the contract. - Bernama

Corporate non-commercial EV leasing demand seen rising

CEO of DRB-HICOM subsidiary says growth will be driven by government-friendly policies

PETALING JAYA: DRB-HICOM EZ Drive Sdn Bhd (also known as Avis Malaysia), a mobility solutions provider, projects increasing demand for electric vehicles in the corporate non-commercial leasing segment this year, driven by government-friendly policies.

Avis Malaysia CEO Mohd Syahrul Yusuf said the forecast aligns with the jump in demand for EV models in 2024 within the company's non-commercial leasing fleet.

"Using EVs will contribute to corporate ESG (environmental, social and governance) compliance, while also helping to reduce fuel costs borne by the company for its fleet. Of course, this will be subject to the readiness of the infrastructure in

Malaysia, but the savings will be there," he said in an interview with Bernama at EON headquarters recently.

DRB-HICOM EZ Drive, a subsidiary of EON Bhd, is the Malaysian licensee for Avis.

Mohd Syahrul revealed that Avis Malaysia aims to increase customer growth by 10% this year, including growth in its car rental business.

"Because of the growing demand for EVs and, at the same time, when we talk about major projects - they do not buy their vehicles; they lease them - we see the potential, along

with the booming Malaysian tourism landscape post-Covid-19," he said.

Avis Malaysia's fleet of 4,200 vehicles includes options such as standard cars, trucks, buses, and luxury models, catering to diverse operational needs.

Established in 1972, Avis Malaysia was acquired by DRB-HICOM Bhd through EON Bhd in June 2014.

The company now operates 18 rental locations and two site offices nationwide, offering a full suite of mobility services, including vehicle rental, leasing, and fleet management. Its eco-friendly fleet includes models such as the Audi Q8 e-tron, Tesla Model 3 and Model Y, providing businesses with sustainable transport choices.

Mohd Syahrul also highlighted

the growing popularity of vehicle leasing in the corporate sector, driven by Avis Malaysia as a mobility solution provider, to lead the creation of a transport ecosystem that is not only seamless but also sustainable and tailored to the customer's needs.

Leasing could also provide hassle-free, peace of mind, and no surprise costs, while also enhancing capital expenditure flexibility and improving cash flow management, he explained.

"As part of Malaysia's leading automotive group, we pass on benefits to our customers, including maintenance services and assistance tailored to their leasing packages," he said.

He added that all vehicles in Avis Malaysia's fleet are licensed by the Land Public Transport Agency, undergo mandatory six-month inspections, and come with enhanced insurance coverage.

PMB Investment declares income distributions for two funds

PETALING JAYA: PMB Investment Bhd, an Islamic fund management company under Pelaburan Mara Bhd, reported income distribution for the PMB Shariah Tactical Fund and PMB Wholesale Sukuk Fund for the financial year ended Dec 31, 2024.

PMB Shariah Tactical Fund declared an income distribution of 3.26 sen per unit, amounting to a total gross distribution of RM1.2 million. The net asset value (NAV) per unit before the distribution was RM0.7312, adjusted to RM0.6986 after the distribution.

The distribution, credited based

on the ex-date of Dec 31, 2024, represents a yield of 6.01% based on the closing NAV per unit as at Dec 31, 2024, with the fund generating a total return of 34.88% (includes distribution yield of 6.01%) for the same period.

Highlighting the fund's robust performance, PMB Investment chief investment officer Hang Tuah Amin Tajudin stated, "With a remarkable return of 111.84% over the five-year period ending Dec 31, 2024, the PMB Shariah Tactical Fund has consistently delivered impressive results. This demonstrates the fund's ability to

navigate dynamic market conditions effectively."

The PMB Shariah Tactical Fund employs a tactical asset allocation strategy, allowing flexibility to adjust allocations across various syariah-compliant asset classes, including equities, sukuk, Islamic money market instruments, and deposits. Depending on market conditions, the allocation to equity or non-equity investments ranges from 0% to 100% of the fund's NAV.

Meanwhile, the PMB Wholesale Sukuk Fund declared a distribution of 4.67 sen per unit, totalling RM816,735. The NAV per unit before

the distribution was RM1.1512, adjusted to RM1.1045 after the distribution. This represents a yield of 4.20% for the financial year.

Both distributions were credited on Dec 31, 2024, with the reinvestment date set for Jan 2, 2025.

PMB Investment chairman Datuk Mohd Idzwan Izuddin Ab Rahman said, "2024 was a challenging year, yet our proactive strategies and dynamic portfolio management ensured consistent performance. Our funds, including the PMB Shariah Tactical Fund, remain a testament to our commitment to delivering value to investors."

Ni Hsin EV Tech gets conditional nod for token crowdfunding on pitchIN platform

PETALING JAYA: Ni Hsin EV Tech Sdn Bhd (NHEVT), a wholly owned subsidiary of Main Market-listed Ni Hsin Group Bhd, has received conditional approval from Pitch Platforms Sdn Bhd (pitchIN) to host its token crowdfunding (TCF) campaign on pitchIN's platform.

In a Bursa Malaysia filing, Ni Hsin Group said pitchIN has submitted NHEVT's white paper and application documents to Securities Commission Malaysia for review and approval.

NHEVT has unveiled the Bixon digital token (\$Bixon), marking a significant milestone in the global electric vehicle (EV) ecosystem. This initiative integrates blockchain tokenisation with green mobility, offering a solution for transparent carbon tracking and accessible EV adoption.

NHEVT managing director Khoo Chee Kong said the transformative ecosystem goes beyond EV adoption as it redefines value creation by embedding blockchain-driven

carbon tracking into everyday commutes and corporate fleet solutions.

"Addressing carbon emissions transparently, \$Bixon is not just a token but a benchmark for sustainable business innovation. Through this bold initiative, NHEVT is not just leading change but defining a movement where green transportation becomes accessible, rewarding, and transparent," he said in the filing.

In partnership with Masverse, a leading Malaysian blockchain technology specialist, the \$Bixon tokenisation is powered by MasChain, a Malaysian-built Layer-1 block-chain renowned for its security, scalability and transparency.

Coupled with pitchIN as a registered market operator ensuring compliance and inclusivity, the issuance of \$Bixon creates a fully regulated, investor-friendly platform that inspires confidence and trust.

\$Bixon introduces an inno-

vative ride-to-earn programme, incentivising eco-friendly commuting while enabling businesses to transition to electric fleets with NHEVT's zero-capex model. This approach significantly lowers barriers to EV adoption, reducing operational costs and environmental footprints while offering measurable returns for investors and stakeholders.

NHEVT's \$Bixon ecosystem directly supports Malaysia's National Energy Transition Roadmap, positioning itself as a scalable model for real-time carbon management and sustainability goals across industries.

By uniting EV technology with blockchain, NHEVT, Masverse, and pitchIN are charting a clear path toward a future where sustainability, innovation, and financial opportunity converge. This collaborative synergy positions NHEVT as a global player in eco-conscious mobility, fostering confidence among communities alike.



From left: pitchIN vice-president of commercial & product Nicholas Chong and COO Xelia Tong; Khoo; Ni Hsin head of corporate and business development Alvin Gan; and Masverse CEO KK Chew and CFO SJ Koay.

TechStore in underwriting deal for ACE Market listing

➤ M&A Securities is underwriter for the IPO

KUALA LUMPUR: Enterprise IT services provider TechStore Bhd yesterday entered into an underwriting agreement with M&A Securities Sdn Bhd, a wholly owned subsidiary of M & A Equity Holdings Bhd, in conjunction with its upcoming initial public offering (IPO) on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia Securities Bhd.

TechStore's IPO exercise encompasses a public issuance of 125 million new ordinary shares, representing 25% of its enlarged share capital, as well as an offer for sale of 25 million existing shares, representing 5% of its enlarged share capital.

Out of the 125 million new shares, 25 million shares will be made available to the Malaysian public via balloting, 25 million shares to its eligible directors, employees and persons who have contributed to the success of TechStore (Pink Form Allocations), 62.5 million shares will be offered by way of private placement to bumiputera investors approved by the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry (Miti) while the remaining 12.5 million shares will be offered by way of private placement to selected investors.

Pursuant to the underwriting agreement, M&A Securities has agreed to underwrite a total of 50 million new shares made available

to the Malaysian Public and under the Pink Form Allocations, while the balance of 75 million new shares made available for application by bumiputera investors approved by the Miti and offer for sale of 25 million existing shares made available for application by selected investors will not be underwritten by M&A Securities.

With operating history dating back to 2011, TechStore is an enterprise IT services provider specialising in IT security and automation solutions, currently driving significant advancements in the transportation sector. The group collaborates closely with clients to deliver tailored solutions, including design, development, customisation, implementation, testing and integration of IT security and automation solutions that meet specific operational needs.

TechStore also provides maintenance and support services for the IT solutions that they deliver. While actively being involved in the transportation industry, TechStore's solutions also have a proven track record across various industries such as utilities, hospitality and leisure, IT and security, as well as logistics, a testament to the robustness of its technical infrastructure.

TechStore has a strong reputation for delivering advanced IT solutions in the transportation industry, having delivered solutions for two out of three LRT lines (i.e. LRT Kelana Jaya and LRT Ampang lines) and the first MRT Kajang line. Notable achievements include the engineering,

construction, testing, and commissioning of telecommunications system for the MRT Kajang line, operation control centre upgrades for the LRT Kelana Jaya line, an integrated infotainment system for the LRT Ampang line and a comprehensive bus system for Rapid Bus Penang.

Currently, TechStore is undertaking a RM116 million Automatic Fare Collection system project for the LRT3 line.

Managing director Tan Hock Lim said, "The signing of this underwriting agreement with M&A Securities brings us a step closer to our upcoming listing on the ACE Market of Bursa Securities, a milestone that we have been working hard towards. We believe going public can unlock new opportunities, providing the resources and flexibility to accelerate our growth and expansion efforts."

"The enterprise IT services industry is a key driver to Malaysia's digital transformation, providing essential infrastructure and solutions that enable businesses to thrive in a rapidly evolving digital economy. At TechStore, we are dedicated to enhancing operational efficiency and supporting businesses in their digital journeys. Our goal is to empower businesses with the tools they need to stay competitive and resilient in the digital age."

TechStore is scheduled to be listed on the ACE Market of Bursa Securities by February 2025, with M&A Securities as the principal adviser, sponsor, sole underwriter and placement agent for the IPO exercise.

China's KK Group expands rapidly in Southeast Asia

KUALA LUMPUR: KK Group, a China-based trend retailer has accelerated its expansion across Southeast Asia, entering four countries last year with its lifestyle brand, KKV and makeup brand, The Colorist.

Embarked on an ambitious expansion in 2024, the company in a statement said it operates more than 1,000 stores in over 200 cities across China.

Known for its "good to shop, good to play, and good-looking" brand concept, KKV led the charge in this international expansion in Southeast Asia at an unprecedented pace, entering one new country every month.

The brand established a strong presence in Malaysia early last year followed by Thailand (October), Vietnam (November), and the Philippines (December), while The Colorist's first overseas store was opened in Malaysia in December.

This rapid growth underscores KK Group's strategic focus and capability to quickly penetrate new markets, and its presence in Southeast Asia has approached 30 stores including KKV and The Colorist brands, as of December last year.

Looking ahead, the group has set ambitious goals with its pop culture brand X11, estimated to make its debut in Southeast Asia in 2025, and it plans to enter the Singapore market in the first half of this year.

As the number of stores under its three flagship brands namely KKV, The Colorist, and X11 continues to grow, KK Group's ability to adapt its product structure to local consumer preferences, maintain stable store operations, and ensure the profitability of individual stores will depend on continuous research and strategic exploration by the international team.

Beyond Southeast Asia, the team is also conducting comprehensive research to explore opportunities and drive new breakthroughs in regional development.

KK Group is committed to enhancing consumer loyalty through respecting local cultures, understanding local markets, optimising product structure, and strengthening partnerships with local partners. - Bernama



From left: TechStore executive director Mohd Fadzil Mohd Daud, Tan, M&A Equity Holdings Bhd managing director Datuk Bill Tan, M&A Securities Sdn Bhd corporate finance head Gary Ting.

Maxis rolls out Mobile Identity for secure authentication on digital platforms

KUALA LUMPUR: Mobile telecommunication services provider Maxis Bhd unveiled its Maxis Mobile Identity solution that delivers seamless, secure, and simplified authentication experiences for mobile users.

The solution leverages a suite of advanced telco verification application programming interfaces (APIs), starting with the Number Verify API.

The Number Verify API authenticates mobile devices by verifying that the provided phone number matches the one used on the device based on real-time telco data.

This ensures a simplified user experience from app onboarding to password resets and logins, replacing SMS-based one-time passwords or transaction authorisation codes.

Chief enterprise business officer Prateek Pashine said Maxis is excited to explore the many possibilities enabled by telco APIs to enhance customer experience further.

"With this solution, we are simplifying the process for users and safeguarding them against fraud and scams.

"We believe the adoption of more such API-based solutions will unlock greater possibilities for businesses and industries to deliver more seamless and secure digital interactions end-to-end," he said in a statement.

This solution can securely verify mobile numbers against valid and active numbers in the background without leaving the platform.

This makes the user journey more seamless and intuitive.

In addition, the solution enhances security by reducing customers' exposure to scams and fraud through SMS verification.

This is ideal for customers of financial service providers such as banks and e-commerce platforms.

Maxis Mobile Identity was showcased at Smart Nation Expo 2024 in the presence of

Digital Minister Gobind Singh Deo.

Following the showcase, Maxis Business, the business-to-business arm of Maxis, looks forward to engaging financial institutions, e-commerce platforms and application developers to drive greater adoption of more advanced API solutions to improve user experience.

The Maxis Mobile Identity solution is built for interoperability and federation amongst operators.

Maxis is partnering with Singtel for the regional federation of telco API to enable network-based authentication for mobile subscribers.

This solution works in accordance with the GSMA Open Gateway framework (Camara), a globally recognised initiative designed to provide universal access and ensure swift deployment and integration across different countries and mobile networks.

Local institutions back Bursa for 11th week

KUALA LUMPUR: Local institutions supported Bursa Malaysia for the 11th consecutive week, with net purchases of RM304 million in domestic equities, according to MIDF Amanah Investment Bank Bhd (MIDF).

In its fund flow report for the week ended Jan 3, MIDF noted that local institutions were net buyers every day last week, extending their net buying streak to 31 consecutive trading days.

Conversely, local retailers remained net sellers of domestic equities, recording net disposals of RM256.9 million, marking two weeks of continuous net selling.

Foreign investors also maintained their selling momentum, recording a net outflow of RM427.1 million last week. This extended their selling streak to 11 consecutive weeks, the longest of last year.

The net selling occurred during three of the four trading days in the shortened week, as the market was closed on Wednesday for the New Year's holiday.

The heaviest outflows were seen on Friday (RM423.8 million), followed by Thursday (RM55.8 million). Inflows were recorded on Monday (RM570,000) and Tuesday (RM11.2 million).

"The sectors that saw the highest net foreign inflows were property (RM115.7 million), utilities (RM36.8 million), and consumer products and services (RM29 million).

"Meanwhile, the top sectors with the highest net foreign outflows were construction (RM89.3 million), financial services (RM45.8 million), and plantation (RM45.5 million)," MIDF added. - Bernama



Foxconn posts record Q4 revenue on AI demand

TAIPEI: Taiwan's Foxconn, the world's largest contract electronics maker, beat expectations to post its highest-ever revenue for the fourth quarter on continued strong demand for artificial intelligence (AI) servers.

Revenue for Apple's biggest iPhone assembler jumped 15.2% to T\$2.13 trillion (RM292 billion), Foxconn said in a statement on Sunday.

It was also ahead of a T\$2.1 trillion

LSEG SmartEstimate, which gives greater weight to forecasts from analysts who are more consistently accurate.

Robust AI server demand led to strong revenue growth for its cloud and networking products division, said Foxconn, whose customers include AI chip firm Nvidia.

For smart consumer electronics, which includes iPhones, there was

"roughly flattish" year-on-year growth, it said.

Total revenue in December alone reached T\$654.8 billion, up 42.3% year on year and the second-highest ever level for the month.

"In the first quarter of 2025, overall operations have gradually entered the traditional off-season," Foxconn said of its outlook for the current quarter.

"Even with record high revenue

in the fourth quarter of 2024, the sequential performance of the first quarter will reach roughly similar levels that are average to the past five years; compared with a year ago, it should show significant growth."

The company, formally called Hon Hai Precision Industry, did not elaborate.

It does not provide numerical forecasts.

Foxconn's shares jumped 76% last year, outperforming by far a 28.5% rise for the broader Taiwan market.

They closed down 0.8% on Friday ahead of the revenue data release, compared with a 0.3% gain for the benchmark index.

The company will report its full fourth-quarter earnings on March 14. – Reuters



Workers standing on scaffolding at a construction site in Hanoi. – AFP/IC

Vietnam's 2024 GDP growth accelerates to 7.09%

➤ Senior official says data 'good foundation' for economy in 2025

HANOI: Vietnam's economy expanded 7.09% last year to US\$476.3 billion (RM2.1 trillion), faster than the 5.05% expansion in 2023, driven by strong exports and robust foreign investment inflows, government data showed yesterday.

Gross domestic product grew 7.55% in the fourth quarter, the fastest quarterly growth in more than two years, the General Statistics Office (GSO) said in a report.

The Southeast Asian country, a regional manufacturing hub, has benefited from a recovery in global consumption despite being badly affected by Asia's strongest typhoon last year.

"This is a positive result amid difficulties including natural disasters and is a good foundation for 2025 growth," Nguyen Thi

Huong, head of the GSO, said at a press conference after the report was released.

Exports in 2024 grew 14.3% from a year earlier to US\$405.53 billion, led by shipments of electronics, smartphones, clothing and farm produce, the report said.

Imports grew 16.7% to US\$380.76 billion in 2024, resulting in a trade surplus of US\$24.77 billion.

The strong rebound in growth was also helped by the government increasing coal imports for power generation to avoid a repeat of the electricity shortages of previous years.

Coal imports in 2024 rose 24.8% from a year earlier to 63.8 million metric tonnes, while electricity output in the year rose 9.6% to 293.3 billion kilowatt hours.

Foreign investment inflows into Vietnam rose 9.4% last year to US\$25.35 billion.

Average consumer prices in 2024 were up 3.63% while industrial production output rose 8.4%.

The benchmark stock index was up 0.13% as of mid-day yesterday after the release of the 2024 data.

Vietnam has set an official GDP growth target of 6.5% to 7.0% for this year.

Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh last month said it would aim for growth of 8.0%.

"Looking forward, Vietnam will actively monitor monetary policies, stabilise exchange rates, and monitor closely big trade partners to have timely policies."

She said Vietnam was among countries concerned over Donald Trump's plans for his second term as US president starting on Jan. 20.

Trump has talked of imposing new tariffs on imports into the US.

"When Trump takes office, his messages will be much clearer, and we will have preparations for the changes under his term accordingly," the premier said.

Oxford Economics said in a note yesterday it expected Vietnam's GDP to grow 6.5% this year, but warned that the momentum of services exports seemed to be slowing.

"Despite the positive growth data, challenges from the banking and real estate sectors remain, and credit growth has been below-trend," Oxford Economics added. – Reuters

Indonesia's Bulog aims to procure 3 million tonnes of domestic rice

JAKARTA: Indonesia's state food procurement company Bulog has more than doubled its domestic rice procurement target for this year to three million tonnes from 1.27 million tonnes in 2024, Bulog data showed yesterday.

The senior minister overseeing food affairs, Zulkifli Hasan, has said that Indonesia will not

import rice this year after buying in more than 3.7 million tonnes in 2024.

"We will optimise domestic procurement during the peak harvest in March to May so that the procurement target ... can be achieved," Bulog official Yayat Hidayat told a weekly inflation meeting.

Zulkifli said the government will raise its purchase price for unhusked rice by 500 rupiah to 6,500 rupiah (RM1.80) a kilogramme from Jan 15.

Indonesia's 2025 rice output is estimated to rise to 32.8 million tonnes from an estimated 30.34 million tonnes last year. – Reuters

China's central bank outlines 'moderately loose' monetary policy

BEIJING: China's central bank has outlined a "moderately loose" monetary plan aimed at boosting domestic demand to spur growth, days after President Xi Jinping called for more proactive macroeconomic policies.

Beijing last year struggled to lift the economy out of a slump fuelled by a property market crisis, weak consumption and soaring government debt.

Officials have unveiled measures aimed at bolstering growth, including cutting interest rates and easing homebuying restrictions, but economists have warned more direct stimulus may still be needed.

The People's Bank of China (PBoC) said in a statement it will "implement a moderately loose monetary policy ... to create a good monetary and financial environment for promoting sustained economic recovery".

The statement reiterated plans to cut interest rates and the reserve requirement ratio which dictates how much banks must hold in their coffers, rather than lending or investing.

It said the changes would be made "at an appropriate time" depending on conditions at home and abroad.

The PBoC emphasised the need to weed out corruption – signalling the continuation of a long-running crackdown in China's finance industry.

The central bank also said it would continue to help local governments resolve debt burdens with "financial support".

The measures are to "prevent and resolve financial risks in key areas, further deepen financial reform and high-level opening up, focus on expanding domestic demand, stabilising expectations, and stimulating vitality", the statement said.

The central bank's announcement came after officials convened for a two-day conference in the capital.

Beijing was aiming for growth of around 5% in 2024, a goal Xi has expressed confidence in achieving but which many economists believe will be narrowly missed.

The International Monetary Fund expects China's economy to have grown by 4.8% in 2024 and to grow 4.5% in 2025. – AFP

New car sales rise to five-year high in America

▶ GM maintains crown with 2.7 million vehicles sold, Stellantis and Tesla face challenges

DETROIT: US new-car sales in 2024 continued to rise from their pandemic lows, bolstered by replenished inventories, higher incentives and surging demand for hybrid vehicles, automakers reported.

Sales of new vehicles finished at 15.9 million last year, according to Wards Intelligence, up 2.2% from the prior year, and the highest since 2019.

Automakers are projecting strong sales will continue into 2025, although President-elect Donald Trump's proposed automotive policies, such as removing tax credits for EVs, present a wild card.

"We're carrying significant momentum into 2025," Rory Harvey, GM's head of global markets, said in a release.

The Detroit automaker defended its 2023 crown as the biggest US carmaker by sales, selling 2.7 million vehicles last year, the company said, up 4.3% from 2023.

Most automakers recorded solid sales results last year, as they adjusted to slowing demand for EVs and relied on their core business of gasoline-powered trucks and SUVs, while some capitalized on soaring consumer interest in hybrid vehicles.

Sales of traditional hybrids increased 36.7% in 2024 compared with the previous year, Wards reported.

Toyota notched a 3.7% sales gain year-over-year in the US, boosted by steady increases of reliable smaller vehicles such as the Camry and RAV4 SUV, as well as significant gains for hybrid vehicles.

Reuters reported last year that the automaker is potentially converting all of its lineup into hybrid-only models.

"For hybrids, we're sold out - customers want them, we can't get enough of them," said David Christ, head of sales and marketing for Toyota in North America.

"Battery electric vehicles, even with the huge incentives we're spending and the federal government's incentives, are just not as in demand."

Ford Motor also benefited from an increase in hybrid sales, which helped the automaker's total vehicle sales rise 4.2% in 2024.

The Dearborn, Michigan, company sold roughly double the number of hybrids compared with its EVs, with 187,426 hybrids sold and 97,865 EVs.

Automakers have axed or changed lofty EV plans laid out when demand seemed much stronger than it turned out to be, but they are still aiming to attract new EV buyers.

Ford said in an effort to support EV sales, which were up 34.8% for the automaker in 2024, it would extend a programme where EV buyers receive free chargers and installation at home through the end of March.

US sales of electric vehicles are expected to approach 1.3 million, or about 8% of all new vehicles purchased, Cox Automotive said.

Buyers' willingness to go electric crept up slightly from 2023, when US drivers bought 1.2 million EVs, comprising 7.6% of all sales, Cox said.

The Trump administration's plans would likely affect auto sales in 2025 and beyond, if the incoming president makes good on plans to roll

back President Joe Biden's EV policies, including a US\$7,500 consumer tax credit on some EVs, as well as increase tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada.

"If you take true demand for the car and you eliminate the US\$7,500 benefit ... it's really going to change who wants them and how they buy them. So we're preparing for that," Christ said.

Jeep maker Stellantis and electric vehicle giant Tesla were the outliers last year, recording slipping sales compared with 2023.

Stellantis had a particularly rocky 2024, selling 15% fewer vehicles in the US compared with 2023, and recording decreases across its popular Ram, Jeep and Dodge brands.

The French-Italian automaker grappled with fallout from an aggressive pricing strategy that ultimately led to the abrupt departure of former CEO Carlos Tavares.

Tesla has faced slowing sales as its lineup grows stale and competition in China intensifies, eating in to an important market for the company run by Elon Musk.

The EV giant reported a rare decrease in yearly deliveries last Thursday. - Reuters



Cars passing under a congestion pricing warning sign on George Washington Bridge in New York. - AFP/FPIC

Fed policymakers say job not done on inflation

WASHINGTON: Two Federal Reserve policymakers said they feel the US central bank's job on taming inflation is not yet done, but also signalled they do not want to risk damaging the labour market as they try to finish that job.

The remarks, from governor Adriana Kugler and San Francisco Fed president Mary Daly, highlight the delicate balancing act facing US central bankers this year as they look to slow their pace-cutting.

The Fed lowered short-term rates by a full percentage point last year, to a current range of 4.25%-4.50%.

Inflation by the Fed's preferred measure is well down from its mid-2022 peak of around 7%, registering 2.4% in November.

Still that is above the Fed's 2% goal, and in December policymakers projected slower progress toward that goal than they had earlier anticipated.

"We are fully aware that we are not there yet - no one is popping champagne anywhere," Kugler said at the annual American Economic Association conference in San Francisco.

"And at the same time ... we want the unemployment rate to stay where it is" and not increase rapidly, she said.

In November, unemployment was 4.2%, consistent in both her and colleague Daly's view with maximum employment, the Fed's second goal alongside its price stability goal.

"At this point, I would not want to see further slowing in the labor market - maybe gradually moving around in bumps and chunks on a given month, but certainly not additional slowing in the labor market," said Daly, who was speaking on the same panel. - Reuters

Microsoft to spend US\$80 billion on AI data centres

SAN FRANCISCO: Microsoft is planning to invest about US\$80 billion (RM360 billion) in fiscal 2025 on developing data centres to train artificial intelligence (AI) models and deploy AI and cloud-based applications, the company said in a blog post.

Investment in AI has surged since OpenAI launched ChatGPT in 2022, as companies across sectors seek to integrate artificial intelligence into their products and services.

AI requires enormous computing power, pushing demand for specialised data centres that enable tech companies to link thousands of chips together in clusters.

Microsoft has been investing billions to enhance its AI infrastructure and broaden its data-centre network.

Analysts expect Microsoft's fiscal 2025 capital expenditure including capital leases to be US\$84.24 billion, according to Visible Alpha.

The company's capital expenditure in the first quarter of fiscal 2025 rose 5.3% to US\$20 billion.

As OpenAI's primary backer, the tech giant is considered a leading contender among Big Tech companies in the AI race due to its exclusive partnership with the AI chatbot maker.

More than half of Microsoft's US\$80 billion investment will be in the United States, vice-chairman and president Brad Smith said in the blog post.

"Today, the United States leads the global AI race thanks to the investment of private capital and innovations by American companies of all sizes, from dynamic start-ups to well-established enterprises," Smith said. - Reuters

Japan PM calls for clarity on steel deal security concerns

TOKYO: Japan's prime minister called for clarity yesterday on why US President Joe Biden blocked a US\$14.9 billion (RM67 billion) deal for Nippon Steel to buy US Steel, warning the decision could hit investments.

Biden's announcement last week cited a strategic need to protect domestic industry, a move that drew sharp criticism from both companies and Tokyo.

"They need to be able to explain clearly why there is a national security concern, or else further discussions on the matter will not work," Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba told reporters.

A US government panel failed to reach consensus last month on whether the acquisition threatened national security - shifting the decision to Biden in the waning days of his presidency.

Ishiba said that the veteran Democrat's decision had sparked concerns over future Japanese investments in the world's largest economy.

"It is unfortunately true that there are

concerns being raised within Japan's industrial world over future Japan-US investment," he said.

"It's something we have to take seriously," he said.

Japan and the United States are each other's top foreign investors.

"It would be inappropriate for the Japanese government to comment on the management of an individual company that was under review as per US domestic law, so we will refrain from commenting, but we will strongly call on the US government to take steps to dispel these concerns," said Ishiba.

Biden's decision, less than three weeks before he leaves office, followed extended wrangling over competing domestic political, economic and trade demands.

The outgoing president - who made the rebuilding of the US manufacturing base a major goal of his administration - had criticised the deal for months, while holding off on a move that could hurt ties with Tokyo.

"This acquisition would place one of America's largest steel producers under foreign control and create risk for our national security and our critical supply chains," Biden said in a statement on Friday.

"That is why I am taking action to block this deal."

The United Steelworkers union quickly welcomed the announcement, describing it as "bold action to maintain a strong domestic steel industry".

But Nippon Steel and US Steel said the outcome reflected "a clear violation of due process and the law".

Nippon Steel had touted the takeover as a lifeline for a US company that is long past its heyday, but opponents warned that the Japanese owners would slash jobs.

The decision to block the deal enjoyed rare bipartisan agreement in Washington.

Republican President-elect Donald Trump and incoming vice-president JD Vance have also campaigned against the sale. - AFP



Trump demands end to North Sea windmills

➤ US president-elect criticises British gov't energy policy as 'very big mistake'

LONDON: US President-elect Donald Trump criticised the British government's energy policy with a demand the country "open up" the ageing North Sea oil and gas basin and get rid of wind farms.

The North Sea is one of the world's oldest offshore oil and gas basins where production has steadily declined since the start of the millennium.

At the same time, it has become one of the world's largest offshore wind regions.

"The UK is making a very big mistake. Open up the North Sea. Get rid of Windmills!" Trump said in a post on Truth Social media platform.

Climate-sceptic Trump has long opposed wind farms.

In 2015, he unsuccessfully fought plans to construct one near his luxury golf course in Scotland.

His post included a link to a report from last November about US oil and gas producer APA Corp's unit Apache's plans to exit the North Sea by year-end 2029. The company expects North Sea production to fall by 20% year-on-year in 2025.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour government won last year's elections with a pledge to build up Britain's low-carbon economy.

The government aims to quadruple offshore wind generation capacity by 2030 to 60 gigawatts as part of goals to lower carbon emissions and improve air quality.

In October, the British government said it would increase a windfall tax on North Sea oil and gas producers to 38% from 35% and extend the levy by one year.

The government wants to use the revenue from oil and gas to raise funds for renewable energy projects.

Oil and gas companies have said the higher tax rate could lead to a drop in investments.

Some companies have sold assets while others merged operations and sought to diversify to other regions.

Asked about Trump's remarks, a spokesman for Britain's government said it would continue to prioritise a "fair, orderly and prosperous transition in the North Sea in line with our climate and legal obligation".

"We need to replace our dependency on unstable fossil fuel markets with clean, homegrown power controlled in Britain - which is the best way to protect billpayers

and boost our energy independence."

Claire Coutinho, the opposition Conservative party's shadow energy minister, said in a post on X in response to Trump's comments that "no other major economy is shutting down its domestic oil and gas production".

"It's totally mad."

Oil companies have been exiting the North Sea to focus on newer basins.

Production has declined from a peak of 4.4 million barrels of oil equivalent per day (boed) at the start of the millennium to around 1.3 million boed now.

Britain and countries in mainland Europe have overseen major offshore wind farm

development, but the sector's growth has stalled as costs ballooned due to technical and supply chain problems as well as higher interest rates.

Some developers been reconsidering their investments in offshore wind, or have assumed impairments, due to the rising cost of building wind farms that can be more than 100km offshore.

Orsted, the world's biggest offshore wind farm developer, trimmed its investment and capacity targets last year.

Britain has a target to largely decarbonise its power sector by 2030, which will mean reducing its reliance on gas-fired power plants and rapidly increasing its renewable power capacity. - Reuters

EV sales hit record in UK but still behind target

LONDON: The UK car industry sold a record number of all-electric vehicles in 2024 but still fell short of the government's mandated targets, an industry trade body said.

Battery electric vehicles made up 19.6% of new cars sold last year, said the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, which was below the government's 22% target for carmakers.

The SMMT reported a "record annual volume" of 382,000 battery electric vehicles sold in the UK last year.

The automobile trade body had already warned in October that carmakers were at risk of missing government targets, with manufacturers facing government penalties of £15,000 (RM84,000) per polluting vehicle sold above the limits.

However, the government has since assured that it expects all manufacturers to avoid the penalties in 2024 by taking advantage of flexibility mechanisms that will take into account, among other things, emissions reductions across the whole fleet.

The group's CEO Mike Hawes said that while the market share of electric vehicles grew, this came at a "huge cost" to the industry.

The chief executive referred to the "billions invested in new models" supplemented by "unsustainable" incentives provided by the industry.

Hawes urged the government to review the mandate and to do more to stimulate private demand, including improving charging infrastructure.

The SMMT also warned that reaching the thresholds in 2025 will be "even more intense" with the mandates pushed up to 28 percent of cars sold.

There are also concerns over the Labour government's pledge to bring forward the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles to 2030, after the previous Conservative government pushed it back to 2035. - AFP



A window of a gift shop displaying products bearing the theme of the upcoming presidential inauguration for Trump in Washington. - REUTERS/SPIC

Getty Images explores merger with Shutterstock: Bloomberg News

SEATTLE: Getty Images Holdings is exploring a merger with its rival Shutterstock, Bloomberg News reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

The development comes at a time when Getty Images has struggled to retain customers and replace the lost customers.

Its creative and editorial products, two of its largest revenue segments, declined year-over-year in 2023, according to its annual report.

The decline in the popularity of stock image websites has coincided with the rise of AI tools like Midjourney and DALL-E 2,

which can generate unique images quickly and cheaply.

Seattle, Washington-based Getty is considering how to structure a deal that would unite two of the biggest US providers of licensed visual content, the report said.

Founded in 1995, Getty is a global supplier of stock photos, videos, and other visual content.

Its brands, including Getty Images, iStock, and Unsplash, serve enterprise, media, and agency customers. Getty's shares have lost 58.9% of their value over the past year, according to LSEG data.

Getty Images has over 70 exclusive content partners, such as

AFP, Walt Disney, and BBC Studios, who use the platform for content management and licensing.

Additionally, organisations like FIFA, Formula One, and the NBA utilise Getty to distribute event content and manage commercial rights with exclusive access.

New York-based Shutterstock is a global platform for licensing a diverse collection of 3D models, videos, music, photographs, vectors, and illustrations.

It includes brands such as Giphy, which it acquired in 2023.

Deliberations are ongoing and Getty could choose not to pursue a deal, the report added. - Reuters

Number of employed Germans reaches new high

BERLIN: There were roughly 46.1 million people employed in Germany in 2024 on an annual average, the highest number since German reunification, the statistics office said.

The average number of people in employment in 2024 rose by 72,000 on the previous year, the statistics office said.

With the exception of the pandemic year of 2020, the number of employed has risen consistently since 2006.

However, the pace of employment growth has slowed considerably since mid-2022, the office said.

The increase of 72,000 people employed in 2024 follows larger rises of 622,000 in 2022 and 336,000 in 2023, data from the statistics office showed.

As in previous years, employment growth in 2024 was due to the immigration of foreign workers and the higher labour force participation of the domestic population.

According to the statistics office, these two contributions offset the dampening effects of demographic change.

The service sector was the only contributor to the increase in the total number of people in employment in 2024, with 75.5% of all employed working in this sector.

In industry, the number of employed fell by 50,000 and the number of workers in construction industry fell by 28,000, data from the statistics office showed. - Reuters

MARKET ROUND-UP: JANUARY 6

BURSA MALAYSIA

Trade Statistic 6 Jan 2025



SUNBIZ presents a summary of the day's trading activity on Bursa Malaysia and other markets in an easy to digest format.

Sources: Bursa Malaysia, Bernama, shareinvestor.com and websites

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Bursa Indices

INDEX	CHANGE
FBMEMAS	12,521.10 -12.40
FBM KLCI	1,625.47 -3.99
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	546.93 -3.35
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	174.51 +0.06
CONSTRUCTION	318.36 +7.35
FINANCIAL SERVICES	18,974.30 -48.70
ENERGY	855.27 +3.97
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	542.86 -1.19
HEALTH CARE	2,391.83 +29.80
TRANSPORTATION	1,055.53 +0.48
PROPERTY	1,145.21 -3.84
PLANTATION	7,563.22 -35.20
FBMSHA	12,537.30 -9.10
FBMACE	5,495.14 +22.58
TECHNOLOGY	64.71 -0.10

TURNOVER: 3.477 bil **VALUE: RM2.660 bil**

Bursa closes weaker in line with regional performance

BURSA Malaysia's benchmark index closed lower yesterday, mirroring the weak regional performance as major markets worldwide experienced mostly negative trends.

At 5pm, the FBM KLCI declined 3.99 points or 0.24% to 1,625.47 compared with Friday's close of 1,629.46.

The index opened 0.28 of a point higher at 1,629.74 and moved between 1,623.64 and 1,631.71 throughout the day.

Market breadth was negative with losers outpacing gainers 575 to 505, while 489 counters remained unchanged, 784 untraded and 10 others suspended.

Turnover rose to 3.47 billion units valued at RM2.66 billion against Friday's 3.7 billion units valued at RM2.87 billion.

UOB Kay Hian Wealth Advisors head of investment research Mohd Sedek Jantan said market sentiment was further dampened by concerns over China's slowing economy, the outlook for US interest rates, and ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

He said across Asia, caution prevailed, driven by fears that President-elect Donald Trump's proposed policies, including significant increases in tariffs on imports from China and other countries, could hinder growth in a region heavily reliant on trade.

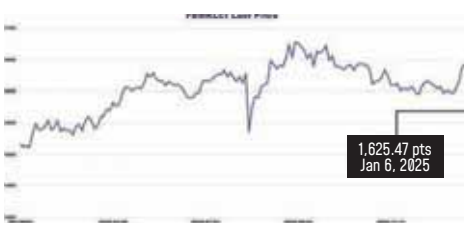
"Locally, these concerns were exacerbated by mixed performances in regional markets," he told Bernama.

Among the heavyweights, Maybank lost four sen to RM10.10, CIMB declined three sen to RM8.08, Tenaga Nasional slid two sen to RM14.58, and IHH Healthcare fell one sen to RM7.27, while Public Bank rose one sen to RM4.51.

For active stocks, Velesto and MYEG were one sen lower at 15.5 sen and 97.5 sen, respectively, Ekovest shed 1.5 sen to 37 sen. Velocity added one sen to 8.0 sen, and Top Glove gained three sen to RM1.36.

Top 20 Actives

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
HSI-CWAZ	0.065	-0.005	-7.14	1,507,708
VELOCITY	0.080	0.010	14.29	1,502,084
HSI-PWB1	0.105	-0.010	-8.70	1,076,229
TOPGLOV	1.360	0.030	2.26	702,495
YTLPOWR-C64	0.075	-0.005	-6.25	579,154
VELEST0	0.155	-0.010	-6.06	456,387
MYEG	0.975	-0.010	-1.02	442,760
TAWIN	0.025	0.005	25.00	416,095
EKOVEST	0.370	-0.015	-3.90	392,719
HSI-CWA2	0.090	-0.005	-5.26	377,724
HM	0.205	0.015	7.89	326,737
HSI-PWBH	0.160	-0.020	-11.11	326,356
CAREPLS	0.270	0.010	3.85	323,408
SUPERMX	1.290	0.020	1.57	309,704
AIMFLEX	0.150	-0.005	-3.23	299,728
ARMADA	0.665	0.010	1.53	292,000
HSI-CYY	0.120	-0.020	-14.29	285,019
WCT	0.980	-0.040	-3.92	275,225
HSI-CWAM	0.025	-	-	271,432
TWL	0.025	-	-	270,612



Top 20 Gainers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
EUROSP	2.770	0.480	1,455
MPI	25.100	0.360	917
ARKA	1.850	0.250	400
NATGATE	2.760	0.240	245,077
PIE	6.300	0.230	9,083
GAMUDA	4.860	0.160	254,620
KFIMA	2.450	0.150	7,049
KESM	3.740	0.140	1,119
MBMR	6.400	0.140	2,099
NPC	2.300	0.140	60
SUNCON	4.900	0.130	28,198
NSOP	4.000	0.120	52
IJM	3.190	0.110	186,326
GOHUB	1.270	0.100	45,285
KSENG	5.600	0.100	287
PETGAS	17.780	0.100	2,709
SBAGAN	5.380	0.100	330
APOLLO	6.680	0.090	206
IJM-C91	0.150	0.090	3,305
WASCO	1.150	0.090	44,063

Top 20 Gainers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
IJM-C91	0.150	150.00	3,305
KGROUP	0.010	100.00	396
PARLO-WA	0.010	100.00	1,285
BCMALL	0.015	50.00	54,807
COMPUTG	0.015	50.00	1,802
ECOHLD5	0.030	50.00	6,950
IJM-C93	0.015	50.00	201
NATGATE-CD	0.135	50.00	98,843
NATGATE-CB	0.130	44.44	7,495
NATGATE-CF	0.165	43.48	14,310
DAYANG-C42	0.050	42.86	6,452
NATGATE-CC	0.120	41.18	69,727
IJM-C95	0.070	40.00	82,849
SGFCAP-WC	0.035	40.00	253
YINSON-C37	0.090	38.46	2,850
ARMADA-C91	0.040	33.33	5,350
LHI-C23	0.020	33.33	500
SUNCON-C22	0.020	33.33	6,779
VS-C88	0.020	33.33	4,000
SUNCON-C28	0.105	31.25	2,800

World Stocks/Commodities

INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE (%)
DJIA (US)	42,732.13	+339.86	+0.80
S&P 500 (US)	5,942.47	+73.92	+1.26
NASDAQ (US)	19,621.68	+340.89	+1.77
NYSE (US)	19,254.29	+158.87	+0.83
EURO STOXX 50 (EUR)	4,900.49	+29.04	+0.60
FTSE 100 (UK)	8,207.66	-16.32	-0.20
DAX (GER)	19,948.97	+42.89	+0.22
NIKKEI 225 (JPN)	39,307.05	-587.49	-1.47
TOPIX (JPN)	2,756.38	-28.54	-1.02
HANG SENG INDEX (HK)	19,688.29	-71.98	-0.36
CSI 300 (CHN)	3,768.97	-6.19	-0.16
SH SE COM (CHN)	3,206.92	-4.51	-0.14
KOSPI INDEX (SK)	2,488.64	+46.72	+1.91
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	181.37	+0.28	+0.15
ASX 200 (AUS)	8,257.45	+6.95	+0.08
ALL ORDINARIES INDX (AUS)	8,516.53	+4.64	+0.05
SENSEX INDEX (IND)	78,006.50	-1216.61	-1.54
FBM KLCI	1,626.77	-2.69	-0.17
STRAITS TIMES INDEX (S'PORE)	3,814.20	+12.37	+0.33
WTI (US\$/BBL)	73.61	-0.35	-0.47
BRENT (US\$/BBL)	76.15	-0.36	-0.47
GOLD (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	2,641.80	-12.90	-0.49
SILVER (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	30.19	+0.13	+0.42
PLATINUM (US\$/T OZ)	944.83	+5.32	+0.57
COPPER (COMEX) (US CENTS/LB.)	409.25	+1.90	+0.47
COPPER 3MO (LME) (US\$/MT)	2,493.50	-35.50	-1.40
CORN (US CENTS/BU.)	454.25	+3.50	+0.78
WHEAT (US CENTS/BU.)	532.75	+3.50	+0.66
SOYBEAN OIL (CBOT) (US CENTS/LB.)	40.27	+0.34	+0.85
COCOA (ICE) (US\$/MT)	11,238.00	+101.00	+0.91
RUBBER (S'PORE) (US CENTS/KG)	185.70	-2.90	-1.54

As at 5pm, Jan 6

Top 20 Losers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
NESTLE	96.480	-1.740	372
PETDAG	19.820	-0.640	800
F&N	27.000	-0.620	1,266
HLIND	13.880	-0.220	1,486
CARLSBGG	20.660	-0.140	3,191
PARAGON	2.570	-0.140	182
HLBANK	20.380	-0.120	4,466
SCIPACK	1.780	-0.120	224
FBM KLCI-HB1	0.045	-0.105	1,000
HLFG	18.100	-0.100	246
KLK	21.420	-0.100	1,171
PCHEM	4.890	-0.100	29,107
SOP	3.020	-0.100	6,190
TAANN	4.120	-0.100	5,102
TM	6.590	-0.100	43,423
LAGENDA-CE	0.055	-0.095	100
KLCC	7.990	-0.090	751
ALLIANCE-PA	20.920	-0.080	77
CIHLDG	2.550	-0.080	48
FFB-C4	0.205	-0.080	50

Top 20 Losers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
FBM KLCI-HB1	0.045	-70.00	1,000
CTOS-C9	0.010	-66.67	300
SOP-CS	0.005	-66.67	2,560
LAGENDA-CE	0.055	-63.33	100
CDB-C54	0.005	-50.00	2,500
EAH	0.005	-50.00	1,813
MRCB-C1J	0.010	-50.00	8,000
PICHEM-C99	0.005	-50.00	1,000
PECCA-CE	0.005	-50.00	11,190
UEMS-C1H	0.005	-50.00	2,450
SOP-CT	0.065	-35.00	715
DNEX-C34	0.010	-33.33	680
EKOVEST-C58	0.010	-33.33	11,075
GENETEC-CC	0.010	-33.33	2,525
HSI-CWAN	0.020	-33.33	1,086
HSI-CWAQ	0.010	-33.33	1,300
JAKS-WC	0.010	-33.33	955
JIANKUN-WB	0.010	-33.33	1,001
MRCB-C1L	0.020	-33.33	3,798
SCBUILD	0.010	-33.33	40,612

MARKETS/FROM THE BROKERS

SUNBIZ presents extracts of a selection of commentaries and research reports received from stockbrokers on counters that could be of interest to investors.

Compiled by **SunBiz Team**

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Strong demand lowers Malaysian govt bond yields

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian Government Securities (MGS) and Government Investment Issues (GI) yields trended lower last week, ranging from -3.7 to -0.2 basis points (bps).

The 10-year MGS edged down by 0.2 bps to 3.82%, while the 10-year GI dropped by 0.9 bps to 3.831%.

Kenanga Investment Bank Bhd said the key driver was the slight decline in the 10-year MGS yield, which reflected steady domestic demand amid optimism around Malaysia's economic outlook.

"Also, some foreign investors turned to Malaysia's shorter-dated bonds, drawn by attractive yields amid year-end saturation in the US bond market.

"However, RM1.2 billion in foreign outflows was recorded due to strong US labour market data and renewed uncertainty tied to Trump's return to power. Locally, weak PMI data added pressure, dampening sentiment in the bond market," Kenanga said in a report.

On the flows and yields outlook, Kenanga said the domestic yields will likely rise next week as markets react to the upcoming US jobs report.

"This could further see outflows of bond portfolio funds. Based on preliminary data, combined outflows from bond and equities in December totalled RM4.3 billion, reflecting persistent risk aversion from foreign funds.

"Nevertheless, stable domestic indicators including labour market data, industrial production, and retail sales, could temper the increase in yields if they meet or exceed anticipated," Kenanga said.

Despite the cautious outlook, Malaysia's bond market remains supported by resilient domestic fundamentals and favourable economic indicators.

Ringgit continues to ease as US economy shows strength

THE ringgit continued its downtrend to close lower against the US dollar yesterday as the American economy showed further signs of recovery, spurring demand for the greenback.

At 6pm, the ringgit slid to 4.5090/5135 against the American dollar from Friday's close of 4.4975/5030.

Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid noted that the ringgit has continued to depreciate against the greenback as the US economy continues to show improvement, cementing a hawkish US interest rate outlook this year.

"The latest print of the US ISM Index for the manufacturing sector rose to 49.3 points in December, marking its second consecutive month of improvement. A strong US economy would mean the Fed would have little incentive to ease its monetary policy further, especially when there is a risk of higher inflation due to policy adjustments by the incoming US administration," he told Bernama.

The ringgit closed mostly lower against other major currencies. It strengthened versus the Japanese yen to 2.8583/8614 from Friday's close of 2.8606/8643 but weakened against the British pound to 5.6250/6306 from 5.5800/5869 and fell vis-a-vis the euro to 4.6695/6742 from 4.6288/6345.

The local note traded mixed against Asean currencies.

It rose against the Thai baht to 13.0194/0308 from 13.0540/0753 at the previous close but was lower vis-a-vis the Indonesian rupiah at 278.3/278.7 compared with 277.6/278.1 previously.

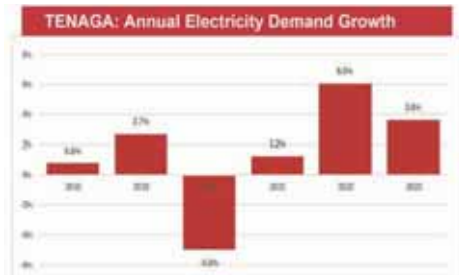
The ringgit went down versus the Singapore dollar to 3.2989/3025 from 3.2828/2871 and was almost flat compared to the Philippine peso at 7.73/7.75 from 7.73/7.74 on Friday.

Exchange Rates

FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.5685	4.4345	4.4245
1 Australian Dollar	2.8640	2.7480	2.7320
1 Brunei Dollar	3.3340	3.2380	3.2300
1 Canadian Dollar	3.1660	3.0810	3.0690
1 Euro	4.7160	4.5640	4.5440
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.5790	2.4840	2.4680
1 Singapore Dollar	3.3340	3.2380	3.2300
1 Sterling Pound	5.6890	5.5090	5.4890
1 Swiss Franc	5.0550	4.8420	4.8270
100 UAE Dirham	125.8500	119.3600	119.1600
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.8390	3.5750	3.3750
100 Chinese Renminbi	62.8200	60.1800	N/A
100 Danish Krone	64.8200	59.6600	59.4600
100 Hongkong Dollar	59.3700	56.4200	56.2200
100 Indian Rupee	5.4100	5.0800	4.8800
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0292	0.0264	0.0214
100 Japanese Yen	2.9030	2.8100	2.8000
100 New Taiwan Dollar	14.9000	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	41.3300	38.0100	37.8100
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6700	1.5700	1.3700
100 Philippine Peso	7.9600	7.5100	7.3100
100 Qatar Riyal	126.7300	120.3100	120.1100
100 Saudi Riyal	123.0400	116.8000	116.6000
100 South Africa Rand	25.2700	22.8100	22.6100
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.6000	1.4700	1.2700
100 Swedish Krona	42.4500	38.6700	38.4700
100 Thai Baht	13.8500	12.2700	11.8700

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

Utilities Overweight



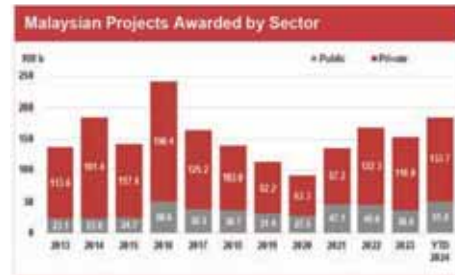
Source: TNB

DEMAND growth to remain strong in 2025. Electricity demand growth for 2025 has yet to be disclosed. However, TENAGA has raised its guidance for 2024 demand growth to 5.8-6.3%, compared to the 1.7% embedded in the IBR mechanism for RP3. This projection, exceeding the country's GDP growth forecast of 4.8-5.3% (as revealed in Budget 2025), is notable, as electricity demand growth has historically lagged behind GDP growth since the 2000s. Looking ahead, demand growth in 2025 is expected to remain robust, driven by increasing demand from data centres.

This is supported by three consecutive quarters of record electricity demand, which grew 9.6% YoY, 6.3% YoY, and 6.1% YoY, with data centres requiring 150MW, 190MW, and 248MW of energy from Q1'24 to Q3'24, respectively. However, this represents only 15% of the completed 1,700MW capacity of data centres as of September 2024. Therefore, demand from this segment is expected to surge in the future. Additionally, there is a potential demand growth opportunity of 7,200MW, including 31 projects (equivalent to 4,700MW) for which electricity supply agreements (ESAs) are already signed.

All eyes on YTLPOWER's AI data centre delivery as the Blackwell Nvidia chip housed in the 20MW AI-focused data centre is scheduled to be delivered in Q1'25 while the delivery of building for the remaining 80MW AI data centre will be ready by Q2'25. YTL AI, a separate entity from YTL DC, and partnered with Nvidia, is the off-taker for this AI-focused data centre. According to Nvidia's website, YTL Communications holds the status of a Preferred Cloud Partner. On another front, PowerSeraya's earnings are projected to decline gradually from their peak as retail prices normalize. - **Kenanga Research, Jan 6**

Construction Overweight



Source: CIDB

THE uptrend in the construction sector is expected to persist through 2025, driven by a robust pipeline of infrastructure and data centre projects. Several delayed public infrastructure projects are anticipated to commence soon, while data centre projects remain strong in the near term, with 7,200MW of data centre opportunities projected by 2035. This growth is supported by major tech giants and data centre operators making Malaysia as a key hub for their operations.

According to the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB), a total of RM185.1 billion in main contractor construction contracts were awarded YTD as of end-November 2024, surpassing the total contract awards of RM152.8 billion in 2023. However, this was still 23% below the previous upcycle record of RM241 billion in 2016 which included the lumpy East Coast Rail Link.

2024 has been a relatively slow year for public project rollouts. The MRT3 underwent a three-month public inspection from October to December, and construction is expected to begin in 2026, with the entire line anticipated to be fully operational by 2032. If this timeline materializes, we believe 2025 could surpass the 2016 peak for contract awards. The Penang LRT Mutiara Line is still pending final negotiations between the SRS Consortium and MRT Corp. Other major projects in the pipeline include the Penang Airport expansion, the second phases of the Pan Borneo Highway and Sabah-Sarawak Link Road, and the Subang Airport redevelopment plan. We view the high-profile KL-Singapore High-Speed Rail as a medium-term prospect. Additionally, the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone presents significant opportunities for the sector. - **Kenanga Research, Jan 6**

Technology Overweight



Source: PublicInvest Research

DESPITE various trade concerns over the heightening trade tension, the year of 2025 is touted to be a time of technology breakthrough, which will see many opportunities to invest, innovate and develop. We believe Artificial Intelligence (AI) remains at the forefront of key topics as did cybersecurity, cloud computing, and robotics. We also gather that some local ATE makers have started receiving more inquiries in the last 2 months, although the outlook visibility remains short.

Electric vehicle sales in China are set to eclipse the sale of traditional vehicles for the first time this year as domestic EV sales are projected to grow 20% YoY to more than 12m. The projections, which include sales for both pure EVs and plug-in hybrids, offer a stark contrast to the outlook for internal combustion engine vehicle sales, which are expected to fall by over 10% to less than 11 million cars in the coming year.

According to Techinsights, China will continue to assert its dominance in shaping global automotive trends. As the epicenter of innovation in vehicle architecture, the country's influence is reshaping how cars are designed and built worldwide. Secondly, the transition to sustainable mobility is gaining momentum. Battery electric vehicles are poised for significant growth, driven by stricter environmental regulations and consumer demand for greener alternatives. Thirdly, the adoption of Level 2 automated driving systems, offering features like lane centering and adaptive cruise control, is reaching a tipping point. Fourth, AI technologies are transforming in-vehicle experiences from voice assistants to advanced driver monitoring systems, AI making the cockpit smarter, safer, and more personalised. Lastly, the supply chain disruptions that defined the past few years are easing, as inventory levels stabilise, manufacturers and suppliers can refocus on innovation and strategic planning. - **PublicInvest Research, Jan 6**



the Sun **LYFE**

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Fabulous Hong Kong

*TV family shoots video
in popular locations*
- P22

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G.E.M.'s live show



The Kuans at Lai Chi Kok Park, a serene park where the family transforms into characters from *Beyond the Realm of Conscience*, offering a beautiful tribute to the city's diverse cultural influences.



The music video for *My Lucky Lunar Song* was filmed in Hong Kong.



The Kuans at the Avenue of Stars overlooking Victoria Harbour as an awe-inspiring skyline towers behind them.



Mskuan and Mama Kuan dressed in Hong Kong police uniforms, making likely reference to Wong Kar-wai's celebrated *Chungking Express*.



Famous for *The World of Suzie Wong* and many TV dramas, Jestinna walks the bustling Ladder Street as a lawyer, recalling Hong Kong's rich film history.

The Kuans make history with Hong Kong video

➤ Blending family bonds with city's cinematic heritage

THE Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) joined forces with Malaysia's renowned family of multi-talented creatives, The Kuans (Jestinna, Mskuan, Perry, Papa Kuan and Mama Kuan), for an uplifting 2025 Chinese New Year (CNY) music video *My Lucky Lunar Song* that was filmed in Hong Kong.

Inspired by their recent family trip to Hong Kong, the music video features The Kuans role-playing their favourite onscreen characters and dancing to captivating, synchronised choreography set against the vibrant streets and iconic locations of Hong Kong, many of which are deeply intertwined with the city's beloved dramas and films.

The music video creatively conveys the nuance of the lyrics of being kinder to yourself and making time for loved ones, for more luck to come your way through a humorous storyline of The Kuans being teleported to Hong Kong to take a break from their busy lifestyle and travelling as a family. This marks a significant milestone for The Kuans as they debut their first overseas CNY music video.

"We wanted a refreshing approach to our 2025 CNY music video by filming in Hong Kong. It is through our recent trip to Hong Kong that we realised that we do not spend enough quality time as a family due to work commitments and travelling as a family felt so precious. We love Hong Kong's CNY vibes and its mix of modernity and tradition, alongside its rich film history that made it the perfect setting for our CNY music video," said Jestinna.

The music video incorporated scenes inspired by classic Hong Kong films and TV dramas, taking viewers on a nostalgic visual journey to several of Hong Kong's iconic locations.

The portrayal of characters came to life with the diverse looks that were put together by Mskuan, who was the stylist for the

music video.

"I had a great time putting my love for fashion into the music video. I drew inspiration from the different films at each scene and added on my personal flavour, to combine relatability and chicness to the outfits," opined Mskuan.

Wong Cho Lam's special cameo

While the focus of the music video is on the locations and the Kuans' personal experiences, it also features a special cameo by Hong Kong entertainer Wong Cho Lam. Known for his comedic roles and beloved presence in Hong Kong's entertainment scene, Wong adds a delightful touch to the video, further enhancing the fun and festive spirit.

"I hope the video inspires more Malaysians to visit the city and experience its beauty firsthand," said Wong.

Whether you are planning a family trip or a solo escape, Hong Kong offers a captivating mix of entertainment, culture, food and relaxation. With its rich culture and events throughout the year, the city is an ideal destination for those looking to experience something extraordinary in the new year.

"Hong Kong is a destination that can truly cater to everyone. Whether you are looking for cultural immersion, food adventures, or simply a relaxing getaway with family, it is a place that offers something for everyone. That is why we felt so connected to the city, and we hope our video can inspire others to discover its charms too," said Perry K.

Celebrating CNY the Hong Kong way

CNY is one of Hong Kong's biggest festivals and is celebrated with red lanterns, lion dances, markets, prayers for good fortune and auspicious cuisines. From a night parade to interactive installations and festive decorations, there are plenty of celebratory



The Kuans aboard *Aqua Luna*, paying homage to *Captain of Destiny*, as they sail through Victoria Harbour and take in stunning views of Hong Kong.

events throughout the city to start the new year with joy and prosperity.

"The CNY music video by The Kuans adds a surprising and innovative twist to traditional celebrations. Embark on a distinctive CNY celebration this year as we invite you to experience the festivities brimming with memories and cultural richness in Hong Kong," said HKTB regional director of SEA Liew Chian Jia.

Party at the CNY Night Parade (Jan 29)

Enjoy dazzling floats and captivating performances along the lively streets of Tsim Sha Tsui on the first day of CNY, showcasing the best of carnival and multicultural festivities.

Watch fireworks at Victoria Harbour (Jan 30)

Join crowds on both sides of Victoria Harbour on the second day of CNY to witness the fireworks display as Hong Kong ushers in the Year of the Snake.

Must-visit hotspots during CNY

- **Victoria Park:** For visitors travelling to Hong Kong before the CNY period, enjoy shopping, entertainment and local snacks at the city's largest CNY market, from Jan 23 to the early morning of Jan 29.

- **Lam Tsuen:** From Jan 29 to Feb 12, experience the unique and legendary Hong Kong Well-wishing Festival, a standout CNY celebration that annually attracts hundreds of thousands of locals and global visitors to Lam Tsuen. Engage in traditional festivities by tossing placards onto the renowned Lam Tsuen Wishing Tree and lighting wishing lanterns.

- **Flower Market:** Enjoy the city like a local by visiting a CNY flower market, where you can marvel at the wide variety of auspicious flowers, festive decorations and souvenirs.

Perhentian Islands now Malaysia's top emerging destination

► East Coast paradise attracting more international tourists



Beach lovers and divers often pick Perhentian Islands as their go-to spot for a serene vacation.

THE Perhentian Islands have emerged as the fastest-growing destination for attracting international travellers visiting Malaysia while Shah Alam is the domestic destination with the biggest popularity leap for Malaysian travellers, according to digital travel platform Agoda.

The Perhentian Islands in Terengganu, rising as a top emerging destination for international visitors, reflects the growing appeal of Malaysia's stunning coastal attractions. Ranked third in Asia for slow travel by Agoda earlier this year, the islands recorded one of the highest average length stays among tourists.

Known for its turquoise waters, rich marine ecosystems and coral reef conservation efforts, the islands are a draw for beach lovers and divers alike. Their accessibility has further improved with the introduction of a private seaplane service, offering a scenic route from Kuala Besut.

For domestic travellers, Shah Alam has emerged as an unexpected standout, the travel platform's New Horizons list further revealed. Often perceived as a suburban centre, it provides appealing family-friendly getaways.

Attractions such as the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Mosque, National Botanic Garden and a burgeoning cafe culture draws weekend visitors. Its proximity to Kuala Lumpur and affordability makes it an appealing destination for Malaysians seeking a quick escape without venturing far.

"The rising appeal of the Perhentian Islands as a top destination for international travellers excites us and highlights the success of ongoing efforts to showcase Malaysia's diverse attractions. Similarly, Shah Alam's growing popularity among domestic travellers reflects a shift in Malaysians' travel preferences as they uncover the unique charm of hidden gems closer to home,

signalling a new horizon for 2025," said Agoda country director (Malaysia and Brunei) Fabian Teja.

Meanwhile, Batam Island in Indonesia leads as the most trending international destination for Malaysians travelling overseas. For Malaysians venturing abroad, Batam Island is making waves as a sought-after destination. Its affordability, easy ferry connections and array of attractions, including water sports, golf, go-karting and beachside relaxation, cater to all kinds of travellers. With the added appeal of duty-free shopping and local cuisine, Batam strikes a balance between relaxation and adventure, earning its spot as a rising choice for international travel.

Looking at the top emerging destinations for Asian travellers combined, it is Shanghai that tops the New Horizons list. The Chinese metropolis is followed by Jeju (South Korea), Paris (France), Nha Trang (Vietnam) and Fukuoka (Japan).

China expects 9b inter-regional trips during Spring Festival rush

ABOUT nine billion inter-regional trips are expected to be made in China during the upcoming Spring Festival travel rush, according to a Chinese national teleconference.

The figure is expected to rise by 7% from the last Spring Festival peak travel season and is likely to hit a record high, news agency Xinhua reported.

This annual travel rush, also known as "Chunyun", is usually a period of high transportation demand as people return to their hometowns for family reunions. The 2025 Chunyun will last from Jan 14 to Feb 22.

Cross-regional rail journeys and civil aviation passenger trips are also expected to hit record highs of 510

million and 90 million, respectively. Eight government departments, including the Transport Ministry, on Dec 31 released an action plan to secure the safety, smooth operations and services of the upcoming travel rush.

The plan specified measures to ensure the supply of charging services for new energy vehicles, pledging efforts to open additional charging facilities in busy service areas and provide guidance for drivers to ensure orderly parking and charging during the peak travel period.

The Spring Festival, the most important traditional festival in China, falls on Jan 29. — Bernama-Xinhua

Transforming flight delay experience

TUNE Protect Group Bhd recently launched a new benefit for its AirAsia Travel Insurance customers – the Delay Lounge Pass, a perk that provides access to over 1,500 airport lounges worldwide when flights are delayed by two hours or more.

Available across AirAsia's global network, the Delay Lounge Pass is available for customers purchasing or opting in for either one of the AirAsia Travel Insurance plans, which include the Value Pack, Premium Flex and AirAsia Plus for flights departing from or arriving in Malaysia and Thailand.

The Delay Lounge Pass offers customers access to airport lounges equipped with high-speed Wi-Fi, charging stations and a range of experiential facilities, including spa treatments and discounts at bars and restaurants.

Aside to gaining monetary compensation due to delayed

flights which is part of the AirAsia Travel Insurance coverage, customers are also compensated with the ease and comfort of airport lounges to make the most of their waiting time.

"Travel delays are unsolicited and we understand the challenges of navigating them when travelling with a big family or managing a busy schedule, especially during peak travel season such as the year end and school holidays. We aspire to enhance every aspect of the travel journey to be as comfortable and stress-free as possible.

"Coupling of core products and services with experiential propositions is common in other industries and what we are doing now is adopting these best practices into the insurance industry to make it more appealing for our target audience, in this case, travellers.

"The experiential proposition that entails our travel insurance is

meant to elevate customers' travel experiences," said Tune Protect group CEO How Kim Lian.

In the event that the flight is delayed but customers do not utilise the voucher that was issued, it will still be valid for one-time use within 30 days from the issuance date at any of the 1,500 airport lounges worldwide. The Delay Lounge Pass voucher is assigned to the registered travellers and is non-transferable.

Customers purchasing any of the AirAsia Travel Insurance plans (Value Pack, Premium Flex and AirAsia Plus) for their travel companions must ensure that each guest is accurately registered to ensure a seamless experience.

Aside to the Delay Lounge Pass, Tune Protect has also enhanced its travel insurance features in the AirAsia Travel Insurance plans by introducing TravelFlex Lite, which is a flexible cancellation benefit.



The Delay Lounge Pass transforms the experience of flight delays by offering customers access to airport lounges. — PICS BY 123RF



1 Hotel Tokyo in Akasaka.



Dusit Thani Bangkok.

New heights in hotel luxury

➤ Explore stunning new properties blending design, sustainability worldwide

EMBARK on a journey through some of the world's most exciting new hotel openings, each offering a unique blend of luxury, design and cultural immersion.

From the nature-inspired elegance of 1 Hotel Tokyo to the tranquil retreats of Anantara Ubud Bali Resort, these properties redefine hospitality with sustainability, innovation and unforgettable experiences. Here are potential future destinations that are sure to elevate travel adventures.

1 Hotel Tokyo

SH Hotels & Resorts plans to open 1 Hotel Tokyo this year, marking a collaboration with Japanese property developer Mori Trust. The hotel will be situated in Tokyo's Akasaka district as part of the Tokyo World Gate Akasaka project - a mixed-use development combining retail, offices and luxury hospitality. The 211-room property emphasises sustainability and nature-inspired design.

The hotel's design incorporates Japanese aesthetics and natural elements, featuring moss-covered boulders, plant-lined walls and *Oya* stone. The 38th-floor main lobby showcases a stone water feature and views of the city while guest rooms blend traditional Japanese design with modern luxury.

Amenities include a Zen garden-inspired spa, *hammam*,

fitness centre, indoor pool and meeting space. The culinary offerings emphasise Japanese cuisine, with the main restaurant offering views of the Imperial Palace and a bar featuring 360-degree views of Tokyo's skyline.

Anantara Ubud Bali Resort

Anantara Hotels newest resort in Bali's Banjar Puhu village, north of Ubud, offering guests a secluded hillside retreat surrounded by untouched jungle landscapes. The Anantara Ubud Bali Resort features 85 accommodations, including modern suites and pool villas, cascading down a forested hillside.

The property offers suites with jungle views and oversized bathtubs while the Balinese-inspired villas have private infinity pools. The resort's dining options include Amerta, a Mediterranean-inspired restaurant led by chef James Willis, featuring a wood-fired grill and Kirana, an all-day dining venue serving Indonesian cuisine. Additional facilities include two swimming pools, jungle-clad yoga deck and a gym.

The Anantara Spa provides indigenous treatments and healing therapies while cultural experiences include local artisan workshops, cooking classes and sacred ceremonies at nearby temples. The resort also offers guided tours to iconic Balinese sites and nature experiences led by a

resident naturalist.

Dusit Thani Bangkok

The flagship hotel of Dusit International, Dusit Thani Bangkok's reimagined property featuring interiors designed by the acclaimed Andre Fu Studio. The hotel aims to honour its 50-year heritage while setting new standards for luxury accommodation in Bangkok.

The design narrative progressively becomes more modern as guests move upward through the property. The lobby features signature elements including a waterfall garden, preserved tropical trees and commissioned artwork by Thai artist Sakon Malee.

The property houses the Napalai Grand Ballroom, one of Bangkok's largest, with a high ceiling and panoramic park views. Other amenities include Devarana Wellness, infinity pool and dining venues, including The Pavilion restaurant and Dusit Gourmet.

The hotel is part of the larger Dusit Central Park development, which will include luxury residences, offices, retail space and Roof Park, all scheduled to open in 2025.

Modena by Fraser Vinh Yen

Fraser's Hospitality has launched Modena by Fraser Vinh Yen, its first hotel residence in Vietnam's Vinh Phuc province. The property features 88 fully furnished serviced apartments, ranging from studios to three-bedroom units, each equipped with kitchenettes and separate living and dining areas.

The hotel residence offers comprehensive amenities including Yen Cafe & Dining for all-day dining, Beta@Modena (the city's first cinema with 160 seats), outdoor pool, sauna rooms, 24-hour gym and a Kids' Playzone. The property provides 24/7 reception, security, concierge and



Anantara Ubud Bali Resort in Puhu.



Tevana Garden in Bali, Indonesia.

housekeeping services.

Situated 50 minutes from Hanoi, Vinh Yen offers guests access to natural attractions such as the Tam Dao Mountain range and Dai Lai Lake as well as cultural sites such as the Vinh Son Pagoda. The location is also convenient for business travellers, with proximity to industrial parks and easy access to three major golf courses, Kim Ngoc Food Street and Noi Bai International Airport.

Opening rates start from US\$35++ (RM156++) per room per night until February 2025.

Tevana Garden

Ayana Bali has expanded its luxury eco-tourism offering with the opening of Tevana Garden on Oct 8 last year. The garden oasis features tropical flora.

Designed by Japanese landscape architects Kazuma Hasegawa and Maiko Shiromizu from Saha Landscape Design Office, the garden combines Balinese charm with Japanese landscape techniques. Key features include a Viewpoint Tower offering panoramic views of Jimbaran, treehouse playground, natural cave and a tea room for private events.

The garden includes an outdoor

event space suitable for weddings and corporate events. Located next to Saka Museum, Tevana Garden complements the resort's existing cultural experiences, including traditional dance performances at Kampong Bali, *jamu* workshops at Ayana Farm and spa treatments.

The garden is accessible to guests staying at any of Ayana Bali's four hotels: Ayana Resort, Ayana Villas, Ayana Segara or Rimba by Ayana.

Treehouse Hotel Silicon Valley

Treehouse Hotels, by SH Hotels and Resorts, is launching its first US property Treehouse Hotel Silicon Valley in Sunnyvale, California, with reservations starting Mar 1. The hotel combines playful nostalgia with tech innovation.

The property features 111 rooms (with plans to expand to 254), incorporating natural materials and artisan-crafted furniture. The grounds showcase hundreds of native oaks, redwoods and fruit trees, alongside over 20,000 plants, honouring the area's agricultural heritage.

Key amenities include Valley Goat restaurant, Beer Garden offering over 30 craft beers, outdoor heated pool, lawn games and meeting spaces.



Modena by Fraser Vinh Yen in Vietnam.



Treehouse Hotel Silicon Valley in Sunnyvale, California.

THE *Brutalist* won the Golden Globe for best drama film yesterday, capping a successful evening for the movie as one of the night's top winners.

The film, which clocks in at more than 3.5 hours, bested Bob Dylan biopic *A Complete Unknown*, papal intrigue *Conclave*, sci-fi epic *Dune: Part Two*, race-infused reform school piece *Nickel Boys* and *September 5*, which charts the massacre at the 1972 Munich Olympics. — AFP

Below is the complete list of winners (in orange):

Best film – musical or comedy

Anora
Challengers
Emilia Perez
A Real Pain
The Substance
Wicked

Best film – drama

The Brutalist
A Complete Unknown
Conclave
Dune: Part Two
Nickel Boys
September 5

Best male actor in a film – drama

Adrien Brody, *The Brutalist*
Timothée Chalamet, *A Complete Unknown*
Daniel Craig, *Queer*
Colman Domingo, *Sing Sing*
Ralph Fiennes, *Conclave*
Sebastian Stan, *The Apprentice*

Best female actor in a film – drama

Pamela Anderson, *The Last Showgirl*
Angelina Jolie, *Maria*
Nicole Kidman, *Babygirl*
Tilda Swinton, *The Room Next Door*
Fernanda Torres, *I'm Still Here*
Kate Winslet, *Lee*

Best television series – drama

The Day of the Jackal
The Diplomat
Mr and Mrs Smith
Shogun
Slow Horses
Squid Game

Best female actor in a television series – drama

Kathy Bates, *Matlock*
Emma D'Arcy, *House of the Dragon*
Maya Erskine, *Mr and Mrs Smith*
Keira Knightley, *Black Doves*
Keri Russell, *The Diplomat*
Anna Sawai, *Shogun*

Best television series – musical or comedy

Abbott Elementary
The Bear
The Gentlemen
Hacks – WINNER
Nobody Wants This
Only Murders in the Building

Best television limited series, anthology series or television film

Baby Reindeer
Disclaimer
Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story
The Penguin
Ripley
True Detective: Night Country

Cinematic and box office achievement

Alien: Romulus
Beetlejuice Beetlejuice
Deadpool & Wolverine
Gladiator II
Inside Out 2
Twisters
Wicked
The Wild Robot



The cast and director of *Emilia Perez* celebrate their success at the 82nd Golden Globe awards.

The Brutalist wins best film at Golden Globes

➤ Spanish language musical *Emilia Perez* also scores big at 82nd edition of awards

Best original song – film

Beautiful That Way, The Last Showgirl
Compress/Repress, Challengers
El Mal, Emilia Perez
Forbidden Road, Better Man
Kiss the Sky, The Wild Robot
Mi Camino, Emilia Perez

Best original score – film

The Brutalist
Challengers
Conclave
Dune: Part Two
Emilia Perez
The Wild Robot

Best director – film

Jacques Audiard, *Emilia Perez*
Sean Baker, *Anora*
Edward Berger, *Conclave*
Brady Corbet, *The Brutalist*
Coralie Fargeat, *The Substance*
Payal Kapadia, *All We Imagine As Light*

Best film – animated

Flow
Inside Out 2
Memoir of a Snail
Moana 2
Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl
The Wild Robot

Best male actor in a film – musical or comedy

Jesse Eisenberg, *A Real Pain*
Hugh Grant, *Heretic*
Gabriel LaBelle, *Saturday Night*
Jesse Plemons, *Kinds of Kindness*
Glen Powell, *Hit Man*
Sebastian Stan, *A Different Man*

Best female actor in a film – musical or comedy

Amy Adams, *Nightxxxxx*
Cynthia Erivo, *Wicked*
Karla Sofia Gascon, *Emilia Pérez*
Mikey Madison, *Anora*
Demi Moore, *The Substance*
Zendaya, *Challengers*

Best female actor in a television limited series, anthology series or television film

Cate Blanchett, *Disclaimer*
Jodie Foster, *True Detective: Night Country*
Cristin Milioti, *The Penguin*
Sofia Vergara, *Griselda*
Naomi Watts, *Feud: Capote vs the Swans*
Kate Winslet, *The Regime*

Best male actor in television limited series, anthology series or television film

Colin Farrell, *The Penguin*
Richard Gadd, *Baby Reindeer*
Kevin Kline, *Disclaimer*
Cooper Koch, *Monsters*

The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story
Ewan McGregor, *A Gentleman in Moscow*
Andrew Scott, *Ripley*

Best film – non-English language

All We Imagine As Light
Emilia Perez
The Girl With the Needle
I'm Still Here
The Seed of the Sacred Fig
Vermiglio

Best standup comedy on television

Jamie Foxx, *Jamie Foxx: What Had Happened Was*
Nikki Glaser, *Nikki Glaser: Someday You'll Die*
Seth Meyers, *Seth Meyers: Dad Man Walking*
Adam Sandler, *Adam Sandler: Love You*
Ali Wong, *Ali Wong: Single Lady*
Ramy Youssef, *Ramy Youssef: More Feelings*

Best screenplay – film

Jacques Audiard, *Emilia Perez*
Sean Baker, *Anora*
Brady Corbet, *Mona Fastvolt, The Brutalist*
Jesse Eisenberg, *A Real Pain*
Coralie Fargeat, *The Substance*
Peter Straughan, *Conclave*

Best male actor in a television series – musical or comedy

Adam Brody, *Nobody Wants This*
Ted Danson, *A Man on the Inside*
Steve Martin, *Only Murders in the Building*
Jason Segel, *Shrinking*
Martin Short, *Only Murders in the Building*
Jeremy Allen White, *The Bear*

Brody picked up Best Male Actor in a Drama award for his performance in *The Brutalist*.

— ALL PICS FROM AFP

Best supporting male actor on television

Tadanobu Asano, *Shogun*
Javier Bardem, *Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story*
Harrison Ford, *Shrinking*
Jack Lowden, *Slow Horses*
Diego Luna, *La Maquina*
Ebon Moss-Bachrach, *The Bear*

Best supporting female actor on television

Liza Colon-Zayas, *The Bear*
Hannah Einbinder, *Hacks*
Dakota Fanning, *Ripley*
Jessica Gunning, *Baby Reindeer*
Allison Janney, *The Diplomat*
Kali Reis, *True Detective: Night Country*

Best male actor in a television series – drama

Donald Glover, *Mr and Mrs Smith*
Jake Gyllenhaal, *Presumed Innocent*
Gary Oldman, *Slow Horses*
Eddie Redmayne, *The Day of the Jackal*
Hiroyuki Sanada, *Shogun*
Billy Bob Thornton, *Landman*

Best male actor in a supporting role in a film

Yura Borisov, *Anora*
Kieran Culkin, *A Real Pain*
Edward Norton, *A Complete Unknown*
Guy Pearce, *The Brutalist*
Jeremy Strong, *The Apprentice*
Denzel Washington, *Gladiator II*

Best female actor in a television series – musical or comedy

Kristen Bell, *Nobody Wants This*
Quinta Brunson, *Abbott Elementary*
Ayo Edebiri, *The Bear*
Selena Gomez, *Only Murders in the Building*
Kathryn Hahn, *Agatha All Along*
Jean Smart, *Hacks*

Best female actor in a supporting role in a film

Selena Gomez, *Emilia Perez*
Ariana Grande, *Wicked*
Felicity Jones, *The Brutalist*
Margaret Qualley, *The Substance*
Isabella Rossellini, *Conclave*
Zoe Saldana, *Emilia Perez*



By popular demand

► G.E.M. I Am Gloria World Tour Kuala Lumpur releases more seats

MANDOPOP sensation G.E.M. has released additional seating categories (RM298 and RM268) for her G.E.M. I Am Gloria World Tour in Kuala Lumpur next month, which are available for purchase now.

Since the announcement of her return to Malaysia, G.E.M. I Am Gloria World Tour has sparked nationwide excitement.

The initial wave of tickets, released last month, sold out within two hours, reflecting G.E.M.'s appeal and the support of her fans. The decision to release additional seats comes as a response to countless requests from fans, offering even more people the chance to immerse themselves in the energy, emotion and artistry of her live performance.

Set to take place at Bukit Jalil National Stadium, this concert marks G.E.M.'s first-ever performance at this venue. Audiences can expect an immersive production, featuring cutting-edge visuals, world-class stage design and G.E.M.'s signature emotional and powerful performances. This event promises to be a transformative evening, in which music, passion and connection



G.E.M. is expected to deliver her most ambitious performance to date.

converge to deliver an unforgettable experience. Presented by Maybank, organised by Toptop Productions and co-organised by Star Planet, G.E.M. I Am Gloria World Tour in Kuala Lumpur 2025 will take place on Feb 15 at 8pm.

Artworks that transform space, perception

ART gallery The Back Room will showcase the textile artworks of Malaysian artist Marcos Kueh at an upcoming international art fair Art SG 2025 in Singapore this month.

The 30-year-old is a Sarawak-born artist whose works are internationally acclaimed with pieces held in prestigious collections such as the Stedelijk Museum and Museum Voorlinden.

For Art SG 2025, Kueh will be showcasing his work "Expecting" – an ode to all the unfulfilled expectations in human's endless chase for happiness. It is a small pause to our burdens of finding impossible solutions to impossible answers and a validation to let things just be things.

"Expecting" is a must-see artwork at Art SG 2025 alongside other exhibits by art galleries Cayon (Madrid, Menorca, Manila), Annely Juda Fine Art (London), Lehmann Maupin (New York, Seoul, London) and Green on Red Gallery (Dublin).

Art SG will hold its third edition in



Kueh's 'Expecting' 2023 textile artwork.

Singapore's Sands Expo and Convention Centre from Jan 17 to 19, 2025. The event will feature 105 galleries from 30 countries and territories, four large-scale, site specific artworks in Platform, a Film programme presented in collaboration with Bangkok Kunststhal, and a Talks programme with prominent art world thought leaders.

Tourists return to post-Olympic Paris for holiday magic

HOLIDAYMAKERS are returning to Paris for the winter holiday magic as the tourism industry rebounds, inspired by the Paris Olympic Games and re-opening of Notre Dame.

"This year, there is much more tourism than last time I came here," said Noemi Rizzato, a tourist from Milan who braved the cold to visit the Place du Trocadero on the Right Bank of Paris, bundled up in her down jacket.

Georges Bardot, a 78-year-old pensioner from eastern France, also pointed to large numbers of foreign tourists amid the holiday hustle and bustle in the City of Light.

"We heard every language except French spoken on the metro," Bardot laughed.

This winter, Parisian hotels are experiencing a surge in demand. The booking rate for two-week Christmas vacations neared 70% in mid-December, nine percentage points higher than a year ago, according to data from MKG Consulting.

Top establishments are doing particularly well, with an increase of nearly 14 percentage points over one year.

According to the UMIH hotel and restaurant union, well-heeled international customers are making a comeback.

UMIH president (Paris) Frank Delvau pointed to an "Olympic effect".

The Games have made tourists want to come back, or to visit, he said.

Tourism professionals said the world's largest sporting event led to a lacklustre summer in Paris.

Wealthy Parisians fled the capital for the summer and many foreign holidaymakers chose to stay away due to transport

gridlock and a security crackdown. Hotels and airlines such as Air France saw a drop in bookings while taxi drivers and restaurant owners said their businesses had been badly affected.

With five billion viewers, the Paris Games were the most followed Games in television and social media history, according to the International Olympic Committee.

"We needed this catch-up effect because the situation was very difficult in the third quarter."

"There was a sharp fall in visitor numbers. The restaurant business was down 40%, 50% at times," Delvau said.

From Nov 1 to Dec 8 last year, international air arrivals to Paris rose by 15.4% compared with 2023, reaching 1.3 million, according to the Paris Tourist Office.

On the Ile de la Cite, the island site of the cathedral, shopkeepers eagerly await the return of visitors after five years of reconstruction work as well as the coronavirus lockdowns that saw a drop in tourist numbers.

"Notre Dame opening this year was the biggest item on our list."

"And we did visit Notre Dame, it was amazing. It is a beautiful site and it was great to see, to pray, to visit," said US engineer Teju Arora.

Around 270,000 people have visited the mediaeval masterpiece in the first eight days since Notre Dame reopened in early December, rector Olivier Ribadeau Dumas told French daily *Le Parisien*.

"Around 30,000 people a day enter the cathedral."

Tourists tell themselves it is time to go to Paris, Delvau said.

"They have Notre Dame and the department stores' windows, which always attract a lot of people." – AFP



Paris is experiencing a surge in visitors due in part to the reopening of the Notre Dame. – AFP/IC



The renovation works began in 2022. – AFP/IC

Medici secret passageway in Florence reopens

A SECRET passageway built 500 years ago to allow the Medici family to pass through Florence, Italy unhindered reopened to the public last month after a 10 million euro (RM46 million) restoration.

The Vasari Corridor, which is more than 700m and runs above the famous Ponte Vecchio, has been closed for eight years.

Designed in 1565 by Giorgio Vasari, a commission by Duke Cosimo I to mark his son's wedding, the corridor begins at what is now the Uffizi Galleries and ends

up in the Pitti Palace across the Arno river.

Its 73 windows offer unrivalled views over the city centre, a Unesco World Heritage site, and will now be accessible to the masses.

Since the 1970s, it has held a large collection of the Uffizi's self-portraits but was closed in 2016 to allow for upgrades to meet modern safety standards.

"Now restored to its original simplicity, the corridor presents itself to visitors as a plain 'aerial tunnel,'" the Uffizi

said in a statement.

It passes above the heart of the city, just as it appeared when the Florentine rulers used it for quick, safe and uninterrupted passage between their residence and the seat of government, it said.

The works, which began in 2022, include new disability access, emergency exits, toilets, energy-efficient LED lighting and video surveillance. – AFP



TRAMLINES

US claim second United Cup title

A dominant United States lifted their second United Cup mixed team tournament title in three years after they beat Poland 2-0 on Sunday with Coco Gauff and Taylor Fritz both winning their singles matches. The top seeds in the US\$10 million (RM45m) tournament that began with 18 nations in contention clinched the trophy when Fritz defeated Hubert Hurkacz 6-4, 5-7, 7-6(4) after Coco Gauff outclassed Iga Swiatek 6-4, 6-4 in Sydney. "Congratulations to Poland on a great week," said Fritz, addressing a dejected Polish side that finished runners-up at the tournament for a second successive year. "They're an incredibly tough team and the margins were very small. I feel that it could have gone either way. "I want to thank my team, unbelievable support. The vibes all week were amazing. "That's one of the things that makes our team so great and one of the reasons why we've been able to do so well. We've just really come together. It's amazing."

Injured Osaka 'very optimistic'

NAOMI OSAKA will undergo a scan on the injury that forced her to pull out of the Auckland Classic final but remains optimistic about playing at the Australian Open, the former world No. 1 said yesterday. Osaka, the 2019 and 2021 champion at Melbourne Park, was

reduced to tears on Sunday when an abdominal injury forced her to quit while leading Clara Tauson 6-4 in her first WTA final in almost three years. "I'm having an MRI today to assess," the 27-year-old said in a brief statement. "I don't feel that it's too serious and I still feel very optimistic about AO." Osaka, who returned to the tour a year ago after a long maternity break, had shown glimpses of the form that won her four major titles on her run to the final in Auckland. She broke back into the top 50 in the world rankings on Monday. The Australian Open begins on Sunday.

Melbourne airport still gives Djokovic the jitters

NOVAK DJOKOVIC has admitted to still getting stressed when he gets off a plane at Melbourne airport after he was deported from Australia three years ago. The 24-times Grand Slam champion had his visa cancelled ahead of the 2022 Australian Open following days of drama over Australia's Covid entry rules and his unvaccinated status. "I have to be quite frank," Djokovic said in an interview with Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper. "The last couple of times I landed in Australia, to go through passport control and immigration - I had a bit of trauma from three years ago. And some traces still stay there when I'm passing passport control, just checking out if someone from immigration zone is approaching. The person checking my passport - are they going to take me, detain me again or let me go? I must admit I have that feeling."

Matsuyama wins Sentry title

HIDEKI MATSUYAMA broke the 72-hole PGA Tour tournament scoring record yesterday, firing an 8-under 65 to finish on 35-under 257 and win the Sentry tournament.

The 32-year-old Japanese star outdueled American Collin Morikawa to capture his 20th worldwide title and 11th PGA Tour victory in the 2025 season opener.

Matsuyama sank an eight-foot birdie putt on the par-5 18th hole at the Plantation Course in Kapalua, Hawaii, to take the low-par mark for four rounds.

Australian Cameron Smith had owned the PGA Tour all-time low tournament record with a 34-under 258 on the same layout in 2022.

Needing a birdie at the last for the record, and with a secure lead over Morikawa, Matsuyama chipped his third from just off the green, then rolled his final putt straight into the hole, allowing himself a right fist pump of celebration.

"That last putt, it felt like if I make it, it's going to be the record, so I'm so happy that it went in," Matsuyama said through a translator.

Matsuyama, who took a bronze medal at the Paris Olympics, won for the third time in 12 months after titles at Riviera and Memphis last year. "I was able to get a great off-season and get a

Japanese star breaks Tour scoring record in duel with Morikawa

fresh start this week and play well this week so it's a great way to start," he said.

Sixth-ranked Matsuyama, the 2021 Masters champion, battled fourth-ranked Morikawa, a two-time major winner, over the back nine but stayed ahead the whole way, his lead wavering between two and four shots.

"I knew Collin was going to play good today so I said, 'Hey I'm going to shoot 10-under' and that's the attitude I had," Matsuyama said.

"Going through the shots I left out there," Morikawa said. "There's a good handful I wish I could have back. When you don't get it done that's where your mind goes."

South Korea's Im Sung-jae was third on 263 with Venezuela's Jhonattan Vegas fourth on 267.

Canada's Taylor Pendrith made the first albatross in the event that launched in 1999, holing his second shot at the par-5 fifth hole from 203 yards with a 6-iron.

Pendrith's first PGA albatross came in his 88th tour start. The ball landed short of the hole, bounced twice and then struck the flagstick and dropped in the hole.

Top-ranked Scottie Scheffler did not compete after suffering a hand injury in a Christmas cooking accident. - AFP



Hideki Matsuyama poses with the trophy after winning The Sentry 2025. - AFP/PPIC

Australia set sights on world domination after taming India

CRICKET'S World Test Championship final is still five months away but it is already playing on the mind of Australia skipper Pat Cummins, saying the defence of their title is "a huge goal" after conquering India.

Australia surged into a June showdown against South Africa at Lord's with a six-wicket victory in the fifth Test against India in Sydney on Sunday.

The thrilling win sealed a first series triumph against their South Asian rivals in a decade.

It also confirmed their place in a clash against South Africa that will determine the world's most consistent red-ball side over the last two years from the nine teams contesting the WTC.

"To hold the Border-Gavaskar Trophy is an amazing feeling, and the extra layer is now securing a spot again in the World Test Championship final, which was always a huge goal for us in this cycle," Cummins said.

"We talk about the World Test Championship a lot. It's a trophy we're really proud to hold so we want to go back and defend it.

"I think it's a great tournament in that you've got to play well consistently and across all different conditions against different teams. We can't wait to get over there."

South Africa booked their spot under the WTC's average points system when they beat Pakistan in a dramatic two-wicket win at Centurion late last month.

Australia play two Tests in Sri Lanka starting later this month before a lengthy red-ball break heading into the WTC final.

Cummins appears likely to miss the Sri Lanka tour for the birth of his second child, with Steve Smith in pole position to take over as captain.

But the Australian skipper is adamant that after four years in the role, he has no plans to hand over the armband permanently anytime soon.

"First of all, I absolutely love what I do. That's the biggest driver in wanting to play Test cricket and work with this team and support staff," Cummins said.

"I absolutely love everything about it, it's that much fun. If I can keep doing it for a while, even better." - AFP

222 Notices

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Difficult' to be Vinicius: Ancelotti

REAL MADRID coach Carlo Ancelotti said yesterday it would be "difficult" to be Vinicius Junior after the player was sent off against Valencia.

The Brazilian winger pushed goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski in the back of the neck amid a spat between the two players and was dismissed.

Vinicius was mocked by Valencia fans at their Mestalla stadium during the game, having squared off with some who racially abused him in a match in 2022.

"I think it is difficult (to be Vinicius), I'm not in his skin, but I think it's difficult," Ancelotti told reporters, after Vinicius saw red in Madrid's 2-1 La Liga win on Saturday.

"To bear everything that has happened, the insults, everything, it's not so simple.

"Obviously he's sad about the red card, he said sorry and we have to look forwards."

Vinicius, who has suffered racial abuse at numerous stadiums in Spain, is also often targeted by fans for his behaviour on the pitch.

The 24-year-old often complains to officials after clashing with defenders and sometimes engages and responds to fans who jeer him.

"What happens in stadiums... I think he has improved his attitude a lot, he can keep improving but nobody is perfect," continued Ancelotti.

"I think he's done a lot of work on that, and he has improved so much that he is the best player in the world." – AFP

Marseille hit five to close gap on leaders

MARSEILLE closed the gap on leaders Paris Saint-Germain to seven points at the top of Ligue 1 after crushing strugglers Le Havre 5-1 at the Velodrome yesterday as the season approaches the halfway point.

Valentin Rongier, Bilal Nadir, Neal Maupay, Elye Wahi and Ulisses Garcia scored the goals for Roberto De Zerbi's team, who also moved three points clear of third-placed Monaco with the victory.

Marseille have won five and drawn one of their last six outings in all competitions, and have scored nine goals in two matches either side of the fortnight-long winter break.

Rongier drove in the first from distance on 25 minutes and Nadir fired a low shot into the far corner to make it two, the 21-year-old scoring his first senior goal on just his second Ligue 1 start.

Maupay, who is on loan from Everton in a deal that will become a permanent transfer at the season's end, headed in Marseille's third goal before the interval.

Nadir, who was starting in the absence of the ill Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg, did not reappear for the second half as Marseille added a fourth goal on 66 minutes when Mason Greenwood squared for substitute Wahi to tap in.

Garcia, also on from the bench, completed the scoring for the home side as De Zerbi's men scored five in a Ligue 1 game for the third time this season.

Le Havre, who are in the relegation zone, pulled one back late on when former Marseille player Andre Ayew headed in.

Elsewhere on Sunday, Champions League revelations Brest slumped to a 2-0 defeat away at Angers, a result which leaves them 12th in Ligue 1 as the season reaches its midway stage next weekend.

Toulouse were surprise 1-0 winners at Lens thanks to a Zakaria Aboukhhal penalty, while Strasbourg came from behind to beat Auxerre 3-1 in Alsace. Lyon, Nice and Saint-Etienne also won over the weekend. – AFP

De Bruyne believes City heading in right direction

■ BY ANDY HAMPSON

KEVIN DE BRUYNE feels Manchester City are getting back on the right track after securing back-to-back Premier League victories for the first time in three months.

The Belgian playmaker also feels his form and fitness is returning after a first half of the season marred by injury.

City have endured a difficult campaign after a run of nine defeats in 13 games across all competitions late in 2024, but Saturday's 4-1 defeat of West Ham brought a brighter start to the new year.

Coming after a hard-earned win at Leicester the previous week, some of the tension at the Etihad Stadium has eased and De Bruyne feels the champions now have something to build on.

"I think it was better than the game at Leicester," said De Bruyne, whose outing was his 400th for the club.

"I think we had some good moments, some moments a bit less and I think, in the end, we lost a bit of rhythm, energy.

"But to win the first game of '25 is good. I think it feels

some players are getting back physically and hopefully it gets better.

"Obviously, it's been a difficult season for many, many reasons, but I think we're getting a bit better."

De Bruyne has had his own personal frustrations having taken time to regain match fitness since a two-month layoff with a pelvic problem in the autumn.

The 33-year-old added: "I can look at myself to be physically better and I'm starting to feel a bit better. That's the only thing I can do."

Despite the scoreline, City did not have things their own way

against the Hammers before Savinho forced the opening goal via a deflection.

A double from Erling Haaland – both created by Savinho – followed by a Phil Foden strike secured victory.

De Bruyne teed up Foden's goal after seizing on some sloppy West Ham passing but the veteran admitted 20-year-old winger Savinho was the real star.

He said of the Brazilian: "He had a lot of moments where he did really well. Lately it seems like he's found confidence again. Scoring last week can help and he had a really good performance." – The Independent



Paris Saint-Germain players celebrate with the trophy after winning the French Champions Trophy. – AFP/PIIC

Well deserved win: Enrique

Late Dembele strike earns PSG French Champions Trophy in Doha

OSMANE DEMBELE'S stoppage-time goal settled the French Champions Trophy yesterday, giving Paris Saint-Germain a 1-0 win over Monaco in a fixture played in Doha.

PSG's troubles in front of goal this season have often cost them in the Champions League, and they were thwarted throughout this game by a combination of poor finishing and some fine saves by Monaco goalkeeper Philipp Koehn.

However, it was ultimately a deserved victory for Luis Enrique's team in Qatar, as PSG won the trophy – the French equivalent of a Super Cup or England's Community Shield – for the 11th time in the last 12 seasons.

"It was a great game between two teams who play good football," said Luis Enrique.

"The result is well deserved and reflects our domination... against one of the best teams in France and in Europe."

This fixture was supposed to be staged in Beijing on Aug 8 as the curtain-raiser to the French campaign.

However, it ended up being called off by the

Chinese authorities, and Qatar – which owns PSG via Qatar Sports Investments – stepped in to stage the game.

It took place at Doha's Stadium 974, which hosted matches at the 2022 World Cup held in Qatar and which was not full for this match.

PSG won a clean sweep of the domestic honours in France last season and were looking to claim the first leg of another treble in this campaign.

A 4-2 win away in Monaco last month, when Dembele scored a double, allowed them to finish 2024 with a 10-point lead at the top of Ligue 1 from both Marseille and the principality club.

When Desire Doue pounced on a slack pass out by Koehn and sent a shot off the bar on eight minutes, it looked like it was going to be a long evening for Monaco.

Vitinha sent a shot just wide and Lee Kang-in had a thunderous strike tipped over by Koehn, although Monaco also threatened when a Maghnes Akliouche hit was turned away by Gianluigi Donnarumma.

Eliese Ben Seghir also tested PSG's Italian goalkeeper shortly after the break, and Vanderson hit the post from a tight angle for Monaco, but PSG stepped up the pressure as the second half went on.

The game was nevertheless heading for penalties before the goal came in the 92nd minute, as substitute Fabian Ruiz was released down the left and sent a low ball across the penalty area for Dembele to convert at the far post.

It is the perfect start to a huge month for PSG, which will notably see them face Manchester City in a crunch Champions League fixture on Jan 22.

Monaco also have a key few weeks ahead of them, including games against Aston Villa and Inter Milan as they too seek to progress to the knockout stage of the Champions League.

"A goal in the last minute always feels like being stabbed in the back," said Monaco's Austrian coach, Adi Huetter.

"But being honest, PSG deserved to win. They had more chances." – AFP

Pep wants Grealish to 'fight' for place

■ BY ANDY HAMPSON

PEP GUARDIOLA has challenged Jack Grealish to respond after losing his place in the Manchester City side to Savinho.

Despite the champions' underwhelming campaign to date, Grealish has been unable to command a regular place in Guardiola's line-up.

Fitness issues have contributed to the England international's lack of form, but the 29-year-old has looked far from the dynamic performer he was in the 2022-23 treble-winning season.

City boss Guardiola said: "It's easy. As much as he (Grealish) looks at himself, he will see the competition and he has to compete.

"Savinho is in better shape and everything than Jack, and that's why I played Savinho.

"Do I want the Jack that won the treble? Yes, I

want it – but I try to be honest with myself for that.

"What happened with Savinho's delivery in the box? It's higher than the other wingers in that position.

"They have to fight. You can say it's unfair. OK, if you think that, then it's fine, but you have to prove (to me). 'OK, I'm going to fight with Savinho, to deserve to play in that position', every single day, every single week and every single month."

Grealish has won three Premier League titles, the Champions League and the FA Cup since his £100 million (RM550m) move from Aston Villa in the summer of 2021.

Yet while he and City have struggled this term – Guardiola's side suffered a run of nine defeats in 13 games at the back end of 2024 –

Brazilian winger Savinho has started to shine.

The 20-year-old summer signing from sister club Troyes scored at Leicester last week and again impressed as he forced an own goal and set up two for Erling Haaland in Saturday's 4-1 win over West Ham.

Guardiola feels it is now up to Grealish to respond accordingly.

He said: "I fought a lot for him, fought a lot to be here. (I say) 'Come on, do it again, do it again'."

"I know that he can do it because I saw him. I saw your level and I want that, every single training session and every single game.

"If not, Savinho deserves. I play him because he produces. Against Everton he was brilliant, then the goal at Leicester and (Saturday) he made a goal and two unbelievable assists. That is top. That's why he played." – The Independent

Slot defends Alexander-Arnold

BY ANDY HAMPSON

Speculation over defender's future did not affect game, says Liverpool boss

ARNE SLOT conceded people will think Trent Alexander-Arnold's performance was affected by rumours surrounding his future in title-chasing Liverpool's 2-2 draw with Manchester United.

The Liverpool right-back, having been heavily linked with Real Madrid this week, had a game to forget as United frustrated the Premier League leaders with a battling display at Anfield yesterday.

Alexander-Arnold, now in the final six months of his contract at his boyhood club, struggled to impose himself and was at fault for the visitors' first goal.

Reds manager Slot does not believe the

speculation had a big impact, but accepts other people will view the matter differently.

The Dutchman said: "I think nine out of 10 people will tell you that it affected him. I'm (the) one of the 10 that tells you that I don't think that affected him.

"What affected him is that he had to play against Bruno Fernandes and Diogo Dalot, two starters for Portugal, great, great players.

"If these players set themselves to a game – and that is what United once in a while does – then it's very difficult to play against them.

"I think that is more difficult for Trent to play against than the rumours that were there during

the week.

"But that's my opinion, and probably everybody's going to tell you that it had to do with the rumours."

Liverpool, who restored a six-point lead over second-placed Arsenal with a game in hand, fought back to lead with a Cody Gakpo strike and Mohamed Salah penalty after Martinez fired United ahead.

Yet they lacked their usual control and United, showing a spirit they have conspicuously lacked of late, restored parity 10 minutes from time through Amad Diallo.

Things might even have got worse for

Liverpool as Harry Maguire spurned a gilt-edged stoppage time chance to snatch victory for United.

Slot said: "Of course it feels for us as two points dropped. I think for many people what stays in their head is what happens in the end and that was a big chance for Maguire, of course.

"But what you then might tend to forget is that two minutes before, Virgil (van Dijk) had just as big a chance to make it 3-2 for us.

"In the end, it was a difficult game. It is not always easy to play against that style of football, especially if they have such good quality players." – The Independent

Bruno demands more from Devils after draw at Anfield

FRUSTRATED Bruno Fernandes said if Manchester United can perform at Anfield they must "do it everywhere" after the crisis-hit side secured a 2-2 draw against Premier League leaders Liverpool yesterday.

United are way down in 13th place but at least they have ended their three-game losing run in the League.

"We have been criticised, and fairly," United captain Fernandes told *Sky Sports*. "Our position in the table says it all, we have lost too many points.

"Even today we can't be happy with a point. We need the points and we could've won the game at the end, but it's a fair result. Both teams played good football.

"I'm pretty upset. If we show this level at Liverpool, first in the league, why can't we do this everywhere? It frustrates me.

"Also, finally I did a proper performance. We said we need much more from ourselves to get more from this season."

The midfielder said this week's FA Cup tie at Arsenal would be tough for the holders but "we want to get to the final again".

"We know how tough it is to play against Liverpool," he said. "Today we put in a real effort to the game.

"Playing with some passion and heart is what is going to give you something from the game. You have to put in effort and that's

why we took something from today.

"It can't stop here, we have to bring this frustration to the next game to understand this has to be the level. If we can do it at Anfield, we have to do it everywhere."

Liverpool skipper Virgil van Dijk said it could have been worse for his team if Harry Maguire had converted a late chance.

"I'm definitely disappointed with dropping points at home but it is what is and we have to move on and we will," he said.

"We found the 2-1 and then it is about trying to manage the game and keep the ball for longer than three and four passes.

"We lost the ball too easily at times and then we were more open than we should have been.

We're not perfect, we're still learning and we have to learn from this as well."

The defender said Liverpool had not underestimated United, despite their rivals' troubles this season.

"That's all the media, media talk," he said. "It's nothing to do with us. We prepared for a very tough game like we have seen today. We didn't think any of that."

– AFP



Manchester United's Bruno Fernandes (left) vies with Liverpool's Ryan Gravenberch during their Premier League match. – AFP/IC

Silva baffled by decision not to send off Davis

BY REUBEN ROSSO-POWELL

FULHAM manager Marco Silva labelled referee Darren Bond's decision to not show Leif Davis a red card "hard to explain" after Sunday's 2-2 draw against Ipswich at Craven Cottage.

Raul Jimenez converted two penalties, the second in stoppage time, to earn the hosts a point after they twice went behind through Sammie Szmodics' opener and then a Liam Delap spot kick.

Silva agreed with all three penalty decisions, but felt the Tractor Boys should have been reduced to 10 men when Harry Wilson was brought down by Davis as he ran through on goal. VAR checked the incident but deemed the yellow card sufficient.

"I'm on the same page as the Fulham fans," the Portuguese said when asked about the matter. "They (decisions) go in the same direction and it was a difficult afternoon for the ref and was hard to explain.

"I can't understand why (no red card was shown). We saw it with the red card for Tom Cairney (upgraded from yellow card after VAR check at Tottenham on December 1) and last week against Bournemouth with the Ryan Christie situation... (yellow card not upgraded after VAR check).

"It was something I can't control but I don't want to get in trouble so it's better to stop in this moment."

The result moved Ipswich level on points with 17th-placed Wolves, who have a game in hand, as they continued their survival bid.

Ipswich boss Kieran McKenna had mixed feelings on the draw, with his side having led twice, and praised 21-year-old striker Delap for another impressive display.

"It's a point gained but also two points dropped because they scored in the 90th," McKenna said.

"I'm proud of aspects of the performance but disappointed with the penalties as they were a little unnecessary. There's a lot of positives and we take the point.

"(Delap) is showing real desire, he's always making his presence known to the centre-backs, he's an excellent outlet and he rolls defenders, he's doing it well. To take the penalty in the manner he did, he did well." – The Independent

Pundits tear into Trent's performance against United

BY LAWRENCE OSTLERE

ROY KEANE criticised Trent Alexander-Arnold's first-half performance at Anfield yesterday at the end of a week in which the Liverpool fullback has been heavily linked with a move to Real Madrid, joking he might be better suited to Tranmere Rovers.

Liverpool insist the 26-year-old, who is out of contract in the summer, is not for sale and when the Champions League holders made an enquiry a few days ago, it was immediately rebuffed with the message they had no intention of discussing it further.

But the speculation intensified amid reports of a second bid from Madrid, adding an unwanted sub-plot to Liverpool's clash with rivals Manchester United yesterday.

Alexander-Arnold appeared to be targeted by United during the game, with Diogo Dalot immediately dribbling and beating the defender,

the first of several promising attacks down the left side of the pitch for the visiting team.

Speaking at half-time, *Sky Sports* pundit Roy Keane was unimpressed.

"We talk about how brilliant Trent is going forward, but Trent's defending today, my goodness, it's like schoolboy stuff.

"There's talk about him going to Real Madrid – the way he's defending he's going to Tranmere Rovers after this.

"He's got to do better defensively, he has to do better."

Alexander-Arnold's day got worse after the restart when he gave the ball away and United immediately sprang an attack down his side.

Lisandro Martinez burst in behind the defender and smashed the opening goal into the roof of the Liverpool net.

"I said I expected a big performance from Trent Alexander-Arnold today after all the talk of going to Real Madrid this week," said ex-Liverpool

defender Jamie Carragher on commentary. "He better hope Real Madrid aren't watching this."

Liverpool manager Arne Slot had remained guarded over his star's future in his pre-match press conference, but confirmed he had spoken with Alexander-Arnold following the Real approach and did not believe it would have a destabilising effect.

"I completely understand the question and why you ask it, but you already know the answer.

"These conversations I have never shared, not about Trent, not about any others, about what I talk to them about," he said.

"It was a conversation as many others we had, me and Trent, so let's leave it at that.

"I can tell you he is playing on Sunday and hopefully he brings the same performances as he brought in for the last half-year, because everybody saw how great a first half of the season he had, how much he is here, how much he wants to win here." – The Independent



MALAYSIA OPEN 2025
(National shuttlers in action today)

Round of 32

Men's singles Leong Jun Hao vs Lu Guang Zu (CHN)
Women's singles Goh Jin Wei vs Malvika Bansod (IND)
Men's doubles Goh Sze Fei vs Daniel Iundgaard (DEN) Nur Izzuddin vs Mads Vestergaard Man Wei Chong vs Kenya Mitsuhashi (JPN) Tee Kai Wun vs Hiroki Okamura Nur Mohd Azriyn vs Xie Hao Nan (CHN) Tan Wee Kiong vs Zeng Wei Han Ong Yew Sin vs Fajar Alfian (INA) Teo Ee Yi vs Muhammad Rian Ardianto Chen Zhi Yi (USA) vs Aaron Chia Presley Smith vs Soh Wooi Yik Junaidi Arif vs Kim Won Ho (KOR) Roy King Yap vs Seo Seung Jae
Women's doubles Vivian Hoo vs Cheng Yu-Pei (TPE) Lim Chiew Sien vs Sun Yu Hsing Pearly Tan vs Lanny Tria Mayasari (INA) M. Thinaah vs Siti Fadia Silva Jia Yi Fan (CHN) vs Go Pei Kee Zhang Shu Xian vs Teoh Mei Xing Ong Xin Yee vs Sung Shuo Yun (TPE) Carmen Ting vs Yu Chien Hui
Mixed doubles Chen Tang Jie vs Wu Hsuan-Yi (TPE) Toh Ee Wei vs Yang Chu Yun Hoo Pang Ron vs Lu Ming Che (TPE) Cheng Su Yin vs Hung En-Tzu Dejan F. (INA) vs Wong Tien Ci Gloria Emanuelle vs Lim Chiew Sien Hiroki M. (JPN) vs Tan Kian Meng Natsu Saito vs Lai Pei Jing Presley Smith (USA) vs Goh Soon Huat Jennie Gai vs Shevon Jemie Lai

No. 1 ranking 'justified'

Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin deserve to be country's top men's doubles pair: Chia

NATIONAL men's doubles shuttler Aaron Chia admits that Goh Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin Rumsani deserve to be the country's current top combination.

Chia, who partners Soh Wooi Yik, acknowledged that Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin proved far superior than them following a stellar 2024 season.

"Whether we are No. 1 or No. 2, we all represent Malaysia. They (Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin) have performed well recently and it is well-deserved for them (to be ranked as the country's top men's doubles pair)," he told reporters during the 2025 Malaysia Open court testing session yesterday.

Last month, Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin emerged as the country's top pair when they surged to third spot from seventh position in the world

rankings while Aaron-Wooi Yik dropped one spot to sixth place.

This is the first time Aaron-Wooi Yik have been ranked second best in Malaysia since the two-time Olympic Games bronze medallists topped the country's men's doubles ranking list in 2019.

Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin have risen to become the country's top men's doubles pair following a remarkable run in the Badminton World Federation (BWF) World Tour Finals 2024, where they became the first Malaysian men's doubles pair to reach the final of the season-finales before going down 17-21, 21-17, 11-21 to Danes Kim Astrup-Anders Skaarup Rasmussen in Hangzhou, China, last month.

Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin also bagged three World Tour titles last season, namely the Japan Open (Super 750), China Open (Super 1000)

and Arctic Open (Super 500).

As for the 2025 Malaysia Open, which will be held at the Axiata Arena from today until Sunday (Jan 12), Chia said he and Wooi Yik will not underestimate the threat posed by their first-round opponents, Chen Zhi Yi-Presley Smith of the United States.

Top national mixed doubles pair Toh Ee Wei-Cheng Tang Jie do not plan to put additional pressure on themselves even as they seek to put a smile on the faces of home fans in the Super 1000 tournament.

Ee Wei-Tang Jie, who described themselves as being "a work in progress", are currently ranked fifth in the world.

The third-seeded Ee Wei-Tang Jie will open their Malaysia Open campaign against the unseeded Hsuan-Yi Wu-Chu Yun Yang of Taiwan. - Bernama

Women shuttlers in danger after shuffle



Pearly Tan (left) and M. Thinaah. -BERNAMA FILEPIC

TROUBLE lurks for Malaysia's women's doubles pairs due to several top combinations having changed their partners ahead of the 2025 Malaysia Open badminton championships at the Axiata Arena today.

National women's doubles head coach Rosman Razak said the situation made it difficult for him to judge how the new pairs would perform at the Super 1000 season-opening tournament.

"We have no data (on the new combinations), so it's very complicated. Previously, we had the data and knew their playing style..."

"Now, we have to start all over again because there are many new pairs and (it's a) new environment for women's doubles," he told reporters during the court testing session here today.

Some of the new combinations in women's doubles are Japan's Misaki Matsutomo-Chiharu Shida and Yuki Fukushima-Mayu Matsumoto; South Korea's Kim Hye Jeong-Kong Hee Yong; and Indonesia's Lanny Tria Mayasari-Siti Fadia Silva Ramadhanti.

Meanwhile, Rosman is targeting national No. 1 pair Pearly Tan-M.

Thinaah to reach, at least, the semifinals of the Malaysia Open for the first time.

"It will be quite tricky for them to get past the first and second rounds. Hopefully, they can do their best and advance as far as they possibly can," he said.

Pearly-Thinaah are expected to meet Lanny-Siti Fadia in the opening round of the 2025 Malaysia Open.

Rosman also hopes that 18-year-olds Ong Xin Yee-Carmen Ting will gain valuable experience when they make their debut in the 2025 Malaysia Open despite their opponents being way above their class.

Xin Yee-Carmen, who are ranked 125th in the world, face a tough opening task as they have been drawn to meet world No. 22 Shuo Yun Sung-Chien Hui Yu of Taiwan.

Meanwhile, Xin Yee, well aware of their underdog tag, aims to spring a surprise against the Taiwanese pair and march into the second round.

Xin Yee also named Pearly-Thinaah as her badminton idols, saying she admires the world No. 6 pair's never-say-die attitude. - Bernama

RESULTS & STANDINGS

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Fulham 2 (Iimenez 69-pen, 90+1-pen)
Ipswich 2 (Szmocins 38, Delap 71-pen), **Liverpool 2** (Gakpo 59, Salah 70-pen) **Manchester United 2** (Martinez 52, Diallo 80).

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	19	14	4	1	47	19	46
Arsenal	20	11	7	2	39	18	40
Nottm Forest	19	11	4	4	26	19	37
Chelsea	20	10	6	4	39	24	36
Newcastle	20	10	5	5	34	22	35
Man City	20	10	4	6	36	27	34

CHAMPIONSHIP

Sunderland 1 Portsmouth 0.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Leeds	26	15	8	3	48	19	53
Burnley	26	14	10	2	31	9	52
Sheff Utd	26	16	6	4	36	17	52
Sunderland	26	14	8	4	39	22	50
Mid'boro	26	11	8	7	43	32	41
West Brom	26	9	13	4	32	21	40

SERIE A

Lecce 0 Genoa 0, Monza 1 (Caprari 6-pen) **Agliari 2** (Zortea 22, Piccoli 56), **Roma 2** (Pellegrini 10, Saelemaekers 18) **Lazio 0, Torino 0 Parma 0.**

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Napoli	19	14	2	3	30	12	44
Atalanta	18	13	2	3	43	20	41
Inter Milan	17	12	4	1	45	15	40
Lazio	19	11	2	6	33	27	35
Juventus	18	7	11	0	30	15	32
Fiorentina	18	9	5	4	31	18	32

FRENCH LIGUE 1

Angers 2 Brest 0, Lens 0 Toulouse 1, Strasbourg 3 Auxerre 1, Marseille 5 Le Havre 1.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paris SG	16	12	4	0	44	14	40
Marseille	16	10	3	3	37	19	33
Monaco	16	9	3	4	26	16	30
Lille	16	7	7	2	26	16	28
Lyon	16	8	4	4	28	21	28
Nice	16	7	6	3	31	21	27

COPA DEL REY (Round of 32)

Elche 4 Las Palmas 0, Ourense 3 Real Valladolid 2, Cartagena 1 Leganes 2, Ponferradina 0 Real Sociedad 2, Racing Santander 2 Celta Vigo.

FRENCH CHAMPIONS TROPHY

Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Dembele 90+2) **Monaco 0.**

BRIEFS

Jun Hao feels the heat

WITH professional shuttler Lee Zii Jia out of the picture, the spotlight now shifts to Leong Jun Hao to carry the nation's sole men's singles hopes at the Malaysia Open 2025. Jun Hao, who is competing in his first ever Malaysia Open, admitted that the pressure is building as he steps onto the court in front of thousands of home fans at the Axiata Arena. "Pressure is there because I'm the only one. I will discuss with the coach how to reduce the pressure. I think pressure is everywhere, whether at home or abroad, but here it is higher and I hope to reduce it," he told reporters when met during the court testing session yesterday. Jun Hao said he is looking forward to play in his first Super 1000 tourney and hoped to be more consistent in higher-level tournaments going forward. Commenting on his first hurdle against the world No. 16 Lu Guang Zu, the 25-year-old described the Chinese player as a tough nut to crack even though both players have never crossed swords before.

Turtles unfazed by absent players

TERENGGANU FC (TFC) remain confident despite being without their import strikers for the Asian Club Championship (ACC) Shopee Cup 2024/25 match against Myanmar's Shan United FC tomorrow. TFC head coach Badrul Afzan Razali expressed full confidence in his local players, who he believes are capable of matching the

performance of their international counterparts. In addition to loan players Muhammad Safawi Rasid and Muhammad Akhyar Rashid from Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT), TFC boast a roster of talented young local forwards, including Muhammad Syahmi Zamri and Engku Muhammad Nur Shakir Engku Yacob, both of whom have consistently delivered strong performances in Malaysia League (M-League) matches. "Our three import strikers - Nelson Bonilla, Ivan Mamut, and Ismaheel Akinade - are unavailable for various reasons," Badrul Afzan said.

Chance to earn national call-up: Sarjit

THIS year's Malaysia Hockey League (MHL) offers players a chance to impress the national selectors and earn a call-up to join the Speedy Tigers. National hockey team head coach Sarjit Singh said his coaches are monitoring the players and those who show good discipline and performance throughout the MHL will be called up to join the Speedy Tigers. "Those who are good will be absorbed into the national squad... this is an opportunity for them to prove their worth. Our coaches are monitoring all players and those who are eligible will be called up to join the national squad," he told Bernama yesterday. A total of 78 matches will be held across six selected venues, including the National Hockey Stadium in Bukit Jalil, for the Jan 4-Feb 22 MHL. Sarjit, meanwhile, said that the Speedy Tigers will start training in early March ahead of the Aug 27-Sept 7 Asia Cup in India.



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SCAN ME

Angry Amorim

Man United manager 'really mad' at players after Liverpool draw

RUBEN AMORIM wasn't in a joyous mood at fulltime and aimed fire at his players despite Manchester United earning a surprise point against Liverpool yesterday.

United produced a spirited performance in the 2-2 draw at Anfield, ending a four-match losing streak, and could've stolen three points at the death.

The Red Devils silenced the Merseyside crowd in the first half and had the better of the chances, with Amad Diallo squandering a header from close range and Rasmus Hojlund fluffing a one-on-one opportunity.

Lisandro Martinez lashed the visitors into a shock lead after the break before Cody Gakpo's curling effort and Mohamed Salah's penalty flipped the game on its head.

But Amorim ensured United didn't return to Manchester empty-handed by producing his latest big-game moment and equalising late in front of the away fans.

Amorim's side defied the odds by halting Liverpool's relentless charge towards a record-levelling 20th League title after a build-up dominated by the expectation of a definitive home win.

However, the 39-year-old wasn't in a celebratory mood after the final whistle and displayed his elite mentality by admitting he was infuriated by United's failure to replicate yesterday's performance in their recent defeats.

"That should be a big issue for our players that even one person thinks you have the ability but not the character, we have to fight that and change that," Amorim told *Sky Sports*.

"I think it is really clear. When we are focused, when we fight for every ball, when we suffer, and we are tired when the game is finished, we are a good team.

"If we don't do that all the time, then we are going to lose games. That is clear to everybody. We controlled the tempo of the game very well.

"Every time Liverpool had a chance, we controlled and had the ball for a moment. That



Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk (centre) vies with Man United's Rasmus Hojlund (right) during their English Premier League match yesterday. - AFP/IC

makes a difference.

"You could see in the game that it was not like we were not suffering all the time because we controlled the ball, sometimes winning some fouls and controlling the transitions.

"It was a good game. I'm happy for the performance, but I'm not happy for the result. But I'm really, really mad because of the other games."

After going into the game by saying that his players were "afraid" to have the ball, Amorim said his shock therapy approach is designed to shake the club out of its malaise.

"I'm trying that (motivation) every day," Amorim said as per *espn.com*. "I'm trying to push this team every day, sometimes it's maybe not the best way.

"I am always challenging these players in everything I do because I feel we are, not just the players, but everybody at Manchester United is too comfortable.

"So I think sometimes we need a shock, and you can see today we were a different team. It was not about the system, it was about the way we faced the competition.

"I think it's a very good sign. It's really clear, we lost three games in a row at home, some of the games we suffer two goals without doing nothing."

United had lost five of their past six League games going into the Liverpool clash and now face an FA Cup third-round tie at Arsenal on Sunday (11pm Malaysian time) before returning to Premier League action with a home game

against bottom club Southampton next Friday (4am).

But after being undone by inconsistency during Amorim's brief time at the club, the former Sporting CP coach is now aiming to avoid another slump after a big result.

"Of course, not just to the end of the season, is so long, but we had some good games during this last month but then we drop again," Amorim said.

"It's something that we need to be really consistent. We had this talk after against (Manchester) City and it was the same.

"We can talk, but we need to show and do it, and the best thing is tomorrow we have training and we have to maintain the same level of mentality." - Express Newspapers/Agencies



Matsuyama captures Sentry title

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Well deserved win: Enrique

Story on page 29



No. 1 ranking justified: Aaron

Story on page 31